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TRUST IS A QUEER THING

BY

REV. NANCY L. WILSON

March 2011

B.A. Allegheny College, Meadville, Pennsylvania, 1972
M.Div. Saints Cyril and Methodius Seminary, Orchard Lake, Michigan, 1980

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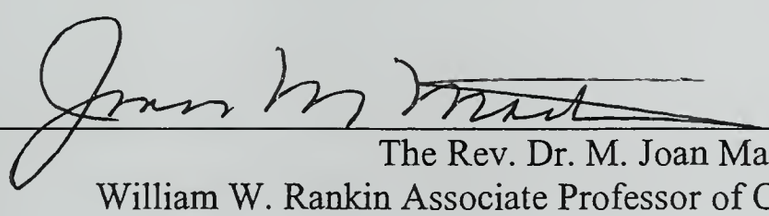
Approved By

Supervisor

The Rev. Dr. William Kondrath,
William Lawrence Professor of Pastoral Theology

Reader 

The Rev. Dr. M. Joan Martin
William W. Rankin Associate Professor of Christian Social Ethics

DEDICATION

I dedicate this doctoral project to three people:

- To Connie Meadows, my "Baruch," for your friendship, encouragement, patience and skill; for being there for me in the beginning of my adventure as Moderator of MCC, and for being so consistent and committed; for your leadership behind the scenes; and
- To Rev. Elder Don Eastman, wonderful example of a "level 5 leader," a truly "renewable resource," whose mentoring and companionship over nearly four decades have blessed me more than you will ever know; and
- To the next and trustworthy Moderator of MCC.

TRUST IS A QUEER THING

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TRUST IS A QUEER THING

PREFACE

People choose to take a course of study, finish a degree, for many reasons. For me, this project comes towards the culmination of a lifetime of ministry, not the beginning, or even the middle. This project will not improve my job prospects. But it blessed and impacted me, and our denomination.

I choose to do this because I needed to push myself, and be pushed, to help Metropolitan Community Churches to face its needs for trustworthy leadership for this still new century. The opportunity to reflect on MCC's history, the meaning of our movement, and to document our new work in leadership development, has been worthwhile. MCC is still transitioning from our founding generation, and it has been useful to try to understand that in our context. The project itself impacted key decisions in MCC's life that will be of benefit for a long while to come.

The decision to do a DMin program also was made as a leadership group in MCC, and although that didn't quite work out as we had planned, it did tap into a lifelong goal of mine, and, I hope, encourage others in MCC to consider going back to school.

I am grateful to the faculty and staff of Episcopal Divinity School, especially Dr. Bill Kondrath, for your unfailing support and excellent guidance. I loved every course I took. It was the course on "The History of English Spirituality," from Dr. Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook, that I thought might be the least relevant to my project. But, it gave me a valuable chance, as a former United Methodist myself, to come to know Charles Wesley, and to compare his experience in founding an "upstart denomination" with our experience in MCC.

I use "LGBT" as shorthand for "lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender," as that is the standard MCC uses in all its publications, and is the most current usage. Sometimes I just use

"queer," which has a more fluid meaning, and more political nuance. When I was speaking of 40 years ago, I often use "gay," as that was the usage then, and, more often than not it really did mean "gay men," or maybe, "gay men and lesbians."

A huge thank you to my partner Paula Schoenwether, family and friends for their forbearance and loving-kindness with all the time and energy it took to do this. Thank you, Connie Meadows, assistant and friend, for your faithfulness and technical help, and for helping me balance tasks, information, and workload while also being in school! And, thanks for those who supported me with resources and housing, and countless other means of support.

I offer a special thanks to the faculty and participants, thus far, of the MCC Leadership Mentoring Retreat, may it bear much fruit!

Rev. Nancy Wilson, March 2011

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Trust is the key to the success of Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC) as a denomination and a movement. There are so many things MCC needs in order to succeed, but I am convinced that trust and trustworthy leadership is not just a key, but **the** key.

Exploring the concept of trust from the viewpoint of experts in organizational development, business, and theology will be central to this project. Using those resources, I will then offer a review of recent developments in MCC as an organization, including our first two Leadership Mentoring Retreats. I will test key theories about trust with MCC leaders and members. Finally, all of this will be used to develop a Leadership Covenant for our denomination, based on these understandings of trust.

Trust is a familiar concept about which people make a lot of assumptions, whether about trust in God, self, neighbor, reality, or the world. There are myths and misconceptions about what trust is, and its role in human life, including the corporate, public, private, and religious dimensions.[1] Trust must be considered in a theological, organizational, sociological and psychological matrix. It must be understood as a process and a product; as both a mystery and as something quite understandable and teachable.

Trustworthiness is essential to leadership in the post-modern, twenty-first century world. According to one business consultant turned ethicist, "Trust is not an emotion,

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[1] Stephen M. R. Covey, *The Speed of Trust: The One Thing That Changes Everything* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 25. This is an excellent chart of myths and truths about trust.

rather, "trust is the framework within which emotions appear....Without trust there can be no cooperation, no community, no commerce, no conversation....(Trust is not a) warm fuzzy feeling...it is a strength, a precondition of any alliance or mutual understanding." [2] Trust is necessary for peacemaking, and for solving pressing global problems. Today, even more than a few years ago, trust is in the headlines. Or, rather, *mistrust* in banks, financial institutions, politicians, religious leaders and organizations.

One of the clearest examples of the problem of trust is the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy's mishandling of the priest sexual abuse scandal. The revelations of widespread sexual abuse of children in the care of the Catholic Church were horrific enough, but the disgraceful role the Catholic hierarchy played in covering up and minimizing the scandal, intensified the mistrust of Catholic laity. Insensitivity to the victims, and wrongly blaming homosexual priests, have only magnified the problem. This is a story above all of a crisis of trust, credibility, and accountability. It is the "Watergate" lesson that individuals and organizations seem never to learn: that cover-up only makes the original violation of trust much, much worse. This is a uniquely Roman Catholic problem in some ways, but, in others, it is illustrative of so much of what is wrong with the church and trust, and a sign of enormous need for change.

Metropolitan Community Church's Mission

Metropolitan Community Church's "missio dei," the mission of God that MCC is privileged to participate in, is to "tear down walls and build up hope."[3] That mission

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[2] Robert C. Solomon, "Ethical Leadership, Emotions and Trust: Beyond 'Charisma,'" from *Ethics, the Heart of Leadership* ed. By Joanne B. Ciulla, Second Edition (Westport, Conn: Praeger), 95.
[3] For MCC's mission statement, and core values see www.mccchurch.org.

requires creation and restoration of trust. MCC is a movement that facilitates new or renewed trust in God, self and a wider community, for queer people and all people who have experienced betrayal and broken trust.

Queer people, our families, friends and allies, have had hearts and trust broken by family, church and the wider culture. Our bodies, sexuality, relationships and identities have been colonized, stigmatized, outlawed, persecuted and excluded. Most queer people internalize the language and framework of the oppressor just to survive. We have the kind of doubled-consciousness[4] similar to that racial minorities acquire in order to live in two or more cultures, one of which dominates and oppresses the other.

Queer children learn from an early age not to trust. We are taught that our feelings are not to be trusted; and that our erotic desires and impulses are abnormal or evil. Because our sexuality may often be different from the sexuality of our immediate family members, we learn to suppress our differences in our own homes. We are taught that we cannot trust God to love us or accept us; and that we cannot trust the religious communities we grew up in as young people.

Queer people, historically, and in most cultures, have had to lie and to choose between high risk behavior or living in terrible isolation and suppression of desires. Through more than thirty-five years in pastoral ministry, I have ministered with gay people who felt they could never risk having sex or any intimate friendships; and people who lived with their parents their whole lives, in a kind of feudal system of servitude and

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[4] W.E.B. DuBois the classic book, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches.* Chicago: A.C.McClurg Co., 190, developed the theory of "double-consciousness" in African Americans, who had to internalize the consciousness of the white world as well as of the African American world to survive.

silence. I pastored people who suffered lobotomies, electric shock therapy; who were arrested, imprisoned, and incarcerated in mental hospitals, for thinking they were gay, or being thought to be gay. I ministered to people who were bullied, beaten, and attacked, sometimes for years, for being thought to be gay, as children.

When I first came to MCC, I met a same-sex couple who lived their whole lives together, for more than forty years, never before daring to tell someone they were gay. I did a holy union for a woman judge and her partner who could not risk telling me their last names. I have heard the stories of young people who have set themselves on fire, plowed their cars into trees, jumped off bridges, or commit suicide other ways because they could trust no one, least of all God.

Meanwhile, all over the globe, today, communities of queer people strive for human and civil rights, political freedom, and respect as human beings. They long for a place, a spiritual home, to be able to trust. They see pride parades in the West, or a "Would Jesus Discriminate?"[5] campaign on the internet. They start to believe that they deserve freedom and safe space.

In December of 2005, I sat in a restaurant listening for four hours to a young Jamaican gay activist tell of the horror stories of lethal homophobic violence in his country. His roommate and best friend had been murdered recently, along with dozens of friends and acquaintances. When I asked him what he needed most (asylum, funds for his very vulnerable gay rights organization, political or moral support), he replied, "We need

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[5] *Would Jesus Discriminate?* is a public information campaign produced locally, and also operates virally on the internet, sponsored by Metropolitan Community Churches, www.wouldjesusdiscriminate.com.

a spiritual community." This young man had the maturity to know that in order to survive and thrive in this long struggle, his people needed to have hope.

In the early years in the gay rights movement in the United States, when Anita Bryant was raging, when Harvey Milk was murdered, we would stand in circles in tacky gay bars in large and small cities, singing, "United we stand, divided we fall, and if our backs should ever be against a wall, we'll be together, together you and I."[6] Lesbians gathered anywhere we could to hear Meg Christian singing, "The way back home to me was the road I took to you."[7]

We sat through endless drag shows in the early days when it was not necessarily Judy Garland's "Over the Rainbow," but, "Somewhere," from the musical *West Side Story*, that expressed our longing:

> There's a place for us, somewhere a place for us,
> Peace and quiet and open air,
> Wait for us, somewhere. . .
> Someday, somewhere, we'll find a new way of living,
> We'll find a way of forgiving,
> Somewhere.[8]

In the earliest days of our civil rights movement, and the beginnings of MCC, we had a choice, and we made it. We **chose** to trust—in God, in each other, in ourselves, in the "moral arc of the universe" [9]—in order to move the mountains of hate, prejudice and

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[6] Dudley Clendine and Adam Nagourney, *Out For Good: The Struggle to Build a Gay Rights Movement in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), 187.
[7] Meg Christian, "The Road I Took to You," from album, *The Best of Meg Christian,* Olivia Records.
[8] Leonard Bernstein, "Somewhere," from the musical *West Side Story*, 1957.
[9] Many attribute this to M. L. King, Jr., but he was quoting abolitionist Theodore Parker, c. 1850's, as quoted in the dedication page of Kevin Boyle's *Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights and Murder in The Jazz Age* (New York: Henry Holt and Company), 2004.

ignorance that oppressed us. One of the songs we have sung so often in MCC reflects that journey of trust:

> I will change your name;
> You shall no longer be called
> Wounded, outcast,
> Lonely or afraid.
> I will change your name,
> Your new name shall be
> Confidence, Joyfulness,
> Overcoming One;
> Faithfulness, friend of God,
> One who seeks my face![10]

MCC is one of the institutions in the LGBT movement for civil rights that has survived and thrived for over forty years. We have also failed. Success includes failure. I want to understand the success and the failure, in terms of trust and trustworthiness. As with any human institution, our reality does not always match our rhetoric, and there are consequences.

Today, MCC is needed all over the globe. We are a post-colonial and post-denominational denomination. We are as much movement as we are institution. We are attempting to harness the "imaginative power" of emerging Queer theology and practice.[11] We must be agents of trust and trustworthiness as we attempt to tear down walls of hatred and oppression; and give reason for people to hope that their cries for justice, respect, human rights, and spiritual community will be heard and answered.

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[10] D. J Butler, "I Will Change Your Name," Mercy Publishing, October 1987.
[11] Mark Jordan, lecture on "Queer Incarnation" June 2008, Episcopal Divinity School.

Context of Metropolitan Community Churches

Our story starts with the story of one person, Rev. Troy Perry. After a long period of soul-searching, and coming out, on October 6, 1968 before the Stonewall Riots in New York, he held the first MCC service in his living room in Huntington Park, California, with twelve people and an offering of $3.12.

In the years just prior to founding MCC, Troy Perry came out to his Church of God of Prophecy overseer. He lost his wife, two young children, his job and his clergy credentials. At one point, he tried to kill himself, which began a process of spiritual awakening, in which he made a powerful, singular, amazing decision: **to trust himself to the God who had created him**. Troy came to trust that his homosexuality was not a sin or a barrier to God or to ministry.

One of the old songs of the church became an instant favorite, reflecting that passion and sensibility:

> Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
> Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine,
> Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
> Born of his spirit, washed in his blood[12]

In the early 1970's, more than five hundred people would sing this song in a rented theater in downtown Los Angeles, people from every background, race and class. These were people who never imagined they would step foot in a church. Rev. Willie Smith, in his "camp"[13] way, trying to mold this rag tag group of people into a singing

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[12] Fanny Crosby, "Blessed Assurance," *New Century Hymnal,* Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 1995, #473.
[13] "Camp" is a queer term for exaggerated, dramatic gestures, affectations, impersonations. Willie often seemed to be impersonating "Sister" Aimee Semple MacPherson, a colorful Los Angeles religious antecedent who some think was either queer herself, or sheltered many in her church.

congregation, like the one he grew up in as a Seventh Day Adventist, and would shout out, "Alright, queens, on your feet for Jesus!"

> This is my story, this is my song,
> Praising my Savior, all the day long,
> This is my story, this is my song,
> Praising my Savior, all the day long.[14]

Decades of pastoral ministry in MCC can be summarized as **helping people to learn to trust themselves, who they are, and who they love; helping them to dare to trust God again**.

MCC has also betrayed trust. When people join MCC, I warn them. For many people, trust is an "all or nothing" proposition. When people have been so hurt by families, and the church, and have been away a long time, and then return to the church, they sometimes romanticize and idealize it. They believe that if their previous church had hurt them, MCC would never do that! It is important for people come to a more realistic picture of MCC as a human organization that can be more functional sometimes than others, that can fail and also betray one's trust. Healing, learning, repentance, reconciliation, forgiveness and restoration are possible and necessary.

MCC as an organization, as a movement, has, at times, succeeded, and at other times failed to be trustworthy. If we can learn from the successes and the failures, and understand the nature of creating, sustaining and restoring trust, we can be the kind of church that can transform lives and history.

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[14] Crosby, #473.

A Brief Summary of Metropolitan Community Church's History:

When I became Moderator of Metropolitan Community Churches in 2005, I began to think about MCC's history in three phases: the gay church, the church with AIDS, and the Human Rights Church. It is important to understand that even though MCC's history is only a brief forty-two years, there has been a different "task of trust" in each era.

The Gay Church

The first phase is "the Gay Church," which includes the years from 1968 to 1983. This was the time of wild, unsustainable growth, when word of MCC was spreading primarily in North America. With few resources, MCC blessed leaders and groups with only the brand name and prayers. Great sacrifices were made. MCC was very "countercultural," still below the radar. We were the vanguard of an alternative, progressive vision of a radically inclusive church that embraced sexual minorities, particularly, but not exclusively. Lisa Isherwood declares that for queer folk, "in terms of the Church an alternate ecclesiology needs to be visible."[15]

MCC embodied that alternative ecclesiology. We were a church founded by an openly gay person, one of the first open, "indigenous" gay churches, and the only one that became a global movement.[16] That new queer ecclesiology was evident every Sunday as liturgies were created and sermons preached, and weddings and funerals were

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[15] Lisa Isherwood, "Queering Christ: Outrageous Acts and Theological Rebellions," *Literature & Theology* 15/3 (2001), 252.

[16] The Church of the Beloved Disciple, Old Catholic Churches, antecedents from the 1940's and 50's such as the First Church of Deliverance (Spiritualist) in Chicago, were also "gay" churches, though they never got much traction, and were often closeted.

performed. MCC unapologetically mixed politics and religion, and was the "only game in town," if you did not want to be closeted and Christian.

It was more "gay" than "gay and lesbian," or LGBT. For men, there was the seventies club scene, sexual freedom, the beginnings of a political movement. Lesbians were torn between the women's movement and the gay movement. Women were still struggling just to get into seminaries as women, much less as lesbians. MCC members were mostly young, working class or poor.

The "trust task" for this era in our church's life was solidarity with the emerging, young, even outlawed gay community. It was to preach that "gay is good," in the way that African Americans had embraced the notion that "Black is beautiful." This is a task for which Troy Perry's leadership style and personality were uniquely suited. He embodied a kind of new spiritual self-esteem that was unshakeable and confident.[17]

The "task" was also to *connect* gay people to church, to God, to the gospel message of unconditional love. This meant speaking to the Church Universal, to governments, to the mental health establishment, to say, "Let My People Go!" People in MCC learned to trust their leaders, pastors, their preaching and teaching, and to admire them for taking risks, putting their lives on the line.

On the one hand, MCC tried to embody the assimilationist model: that we were church-like-anybody-else but that just happened to have a lot of gay people. Many LGBT folks saw the purpose of our movement as equality, more than creating a new kind of

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[17] William Kondrath, "Transitioning from Charismatic Founder to the Next Generation, "*Journal of Religious Leadership,* Vol 9. No.1, Spring 2010, 84. Kondrath says Perry is a typical "Weberian" charismatic founder, "who is viewed by her or his followers as deserving nearly absolute trust." I will deal with this more in a later chapter.

society. For some, the task was simply to be able to have the same rights as anyone else to housing, jobs, education, marriage, family rights, healthcare, religion, etc.

On the other hand, MCC was quite gay acculturated, really rooted in gay language, coming from a place of resistance, from the very beginning. Gay slang, references, abounded in the worship services. Many saw "gay lib" as a part of the sexual revolution of the 60's, the "free love" movement that eschewed monogamy, or "traditional values." There were clashes, from the beginning between those who lean toward assimilationist goals, and those who are more queer, in their view of our movement and MCC. Established gay couples, leading very ordinary lives, in the closet, began to find the church. They did not see themselves in any way as part of a sexual revolution! They just wanted to live their lives, which they saw as simply parallel to their straight neighbors, unmolested.

Politically, today, this is manifested in the U.S. in the differences between The Human Rights Campaign, which is more assimilationist; and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, which creates queer alignment with progressive politics, critiques racism and classism in our movement. MCC has a strong partnership relationship with both organizations.

The "gay lib" movement was founded by many who were not religious, or not Christian. There was a strong gay left which despised religion. Lesbian feminist separatists wouldn't be caught dead going to church, and were suspicious of lesbians who did. Lesbians like me felt we were being asked to apologize for our associations with church. Lesbians and gay men had separate bars and social spaces, and did not mingle a

great deal, even politically. MCC was one of the exceptions, where men and women did work together, worship together, and become friends.

Men and women in MCC did learn to love and trust each other, but it was often tenuous, with women feeling like outsiders, having to really fight to be recognized as leaders. Women and men in MCC had a mix of the assimilationist and queer vision, but could feel pushed one way or the other, depending on the issue. For instance, when AIDS was first spreading through the community, and we understood it to be a sexually transmitted disease, with no cure at all, there was a movement to close all of the bath houses in major US cities that catered to gay men. Some in the community saw this as a threat to civil liberties, to the "queer" sexual values that characterized the community. In the shock and chaos caused by AIDS, there was grief and loss over the very brief period of what were the creation of gay male sexual playgrounds in major cities, a sign of our freedom and fearlessness.

Others saw closing the bath houses as a public health necessity, pure and simple. In general, MCC was on the side of those supporting the closing of the baths. We wanted to be positioned publicly as doing everything we could to save lives. It was threatening, and stigmatizing to have the excesses of gay male liberations *à la* drugs and sex in such plain view of a wider public. For the first few years of AIDS, it felt like all the progress we had made in public perception and acceptance was being destroyed by a sexually transmitted disease. Lesbians had to bear a lot of the brunt of this stigma, as well, though they had little connection, for the most part, to the bathhouse scenes of the 1970's and early 1980's.

We also struggled a lot with boundary issues, long before mainstream churches were dealing openly with these issues and questions. MCC's queer social location made us reluctant to set up rules, or even guidelines for behavior, including sexual behavior. This was before AIDS, before we understood much about sexual addiction. We were not careful about screening clergy or lay leaders, and assumed that people who were kicked out of previous churches were kicked out just because they were gay—not always true! This caused problems, damage to individuals, and in some cases, to our brand. It was certainly problematic for people who were very vulnerable, and may have survived abuse in other church settings.

Early on MCC came out very strongly with a no tolerance policy about adult/child sexual contact, long before other churches were as explicit. This was done in part to contradict the myth of gays as child molesters. We also developed clear, written codes of conduct for clergy and lay leaders, and do not tolerate predatory or abusive behavior in our leaders.

We were entrepreneurial in the extreme in that first decade or so, and, often lacked systems or structures to support long-term growth. This led to credibility problems. We started projects that we did not complete, we seemed to run from pillar to post, not clear about our priorities. Everything was important; there were constant crises, even before AIDS, that strained our organization. Most people in leadership, in the first fifteen years or more, wore two or three hats. MCC as a denomination had very few fulltime employees, everyone did double-duty. This meant we often had a lack of professional staff, and of focus. Mistakes were made that were costly. Local churches

often scratched their heads, wondered what we were doing on a denominational level. Of course, they were dealing with the same issues as well!

And we were very white. I remember hearing white members of MCC, defensively, saying that "they" (people of color, mostly African Americans) "have their own churches," and though MCC welcomed everyone, we should not worry about it when not "everyone" showed up or stayed. It took decades for MCC to articulate its own struggles with racism, to make *real* room for people of color, in the pew and in leadership, and to critique the white cultural hegemony of MCC. It is a struggle that is not over, and still requires vigilance and investment of resources and commitment.

The 1970's was also the era of persecution. Dozens of MCC churches and meeting places were destroyed by arson. In June, 1973, as they did every Sunday afternoon, MCCer's in New Orleans gathered in a bar, the Upstairs Lounge, after church. The place was arsoned, and thirty two people died, including the pastor and assistant pastor, and dozens of our members.[18] Churches were vandalized, and one pastor was murdered.[19] MCC Los Angeles, the first MCC Church, and the first institution in the gay community to own property, lost its church to arson in January of 1973.[20] Death threats, and threats of violence to local MCC churches, pastors and at every General Conference

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[18] Clendinine and Nagourney, 174-187.
[19] Troy Perry, *Don't be Afraid Anymore* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990). Rev. Virgil Scott was the pastor of our church in Stockton, California, and was brutally murdered by someone who called him up looking for counseling.
[20] Clendinine and Nagourney, 181.

were commonplace. MCC leadership was security conscious at every public gathering and event.[21]

MCC positioned itself as the church of the gay community. We gave birth to, or inspired the birth of other institutions, including a synagogue and many other churches and religious movements. Often, people who were coming out came first to the church, looking for community, friendship and something familiar in which to navigate the unfamiliar. It was where they got connected.

Being the church of the gay community sometimes made it harder to be a prophetic voice of critique of "gay culture." Sometimes MCC churches were the only institution with a meeting space in the gay community in a city or town (this is still true today), and were the community center. Other times the church set itself apart from the community, shielding and sheltering itself, sometimes under the veil of "we are the nice gay people who go to church, not 'bar people.'"

When MCC was simply the church that blessed gay culture, it became hard to address issues of race or class, or sexism. All of our churches and pastors have felt like at times they had to turn a blind eye to some activity or practice that seemed over the top, not healthy or ethical. In the early days, the Mafia owned every gay bar in major cities. It made "bar ministry" complicated, at times, when you knew who you were supporting. The only entrepreneurs, in the early days, that would write big checks to gay organizations were owners of bars, bathhouses, and pornography producers. Church

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[21] John Shelby Spong, *Here I Stand: My Struggle for a Christianity of Integrity, Love and Equality* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2000), 390-391, an interesting account of an Episcopal Bishop's encounter with our security concerns.

newsletters and bulletins in MCC in the 70's advertised gay businesses that were not necessarily "respectable." We have come from being marginal, outlawed, sometimes in the company of people with criminal associations, to eschewing that kind of association.

Sometimes it became necessary to challenge business people in our community who owned establishments (mostly bars) that discriminated on the basis of race, and even picket them. Or to confront businesses that supported the exploitation of young people.

When I was pastor of MCC Los Angeles, we were right across the street from a notorious restaurant/bar that catered to older men who wanted to pick up very young, sometimes underage, hustlers. The waiters functioned as the "go betweens," sort of like pimps who would set up the patrons and the young kids from the street. MCC Los Angeles ran a youth drop-in center just blocks away, and when I tried to get the City of West Hollywood to deal with this illegal activity that was doing damage to kids we were trying to help, they pretended to not know what was going on.[22] Some of the patrons were major campaign contributors to key city officials. Those kids were not important enough to disrupt this system. I could never get the city or Sheriff's Department to take this problem seriously.

Raising issues of health and addiction were not always welcome contributions. Some labeled MCC as "Puritans" or as moralizing. Sometimes it was seen as an issue between lesbians and gay men.

Then, in the early 1980's AIDS changed everything.

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[22] The name of the establishment was "Numbers," after a graphic gay novel about hustlers by John Rechy, give me a break!

The Church With AIDS

AIDS hit, and hit MCC hard.[23] Fortunately, there were enough churches in at least the U.S., Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia that could do the dual work of caring for the sick and dying while becoming much more political. We worked with ACT-UP, got arrested, created new institutions and alliances. MCC plunged into AIDS work courageously, preached sermons that proclaimed "God is Greater Than AIDS!" The women who stayed and the men who did not die worked together as if there was not this huge cultural gulf between them. AIDS was no respecter of persons, and "outed" people of every class, including celebrities.

The "trust task" of this era was solidarity with people living and dying with AIDS, their friends, families and communities. It was about creating safe, public space for young people who were ill, vulnerable, and stigmatized, especially by religion. The task was to be trustworthy spiritual leaders; to deal with the shame, homophobia, sex phobia and AIDS phobia; to be on the front lines and vulnerable with the activists; and to never give up or give in to hopelessness. Our task became to be relentlessly courageous, compassionate, practical and hopeful in the midst of fear and despair: to become the Church with AIDS.

AIDS was all consuming. It consumed about twenty-five percent of MCC's membership, about thirty percent of the clergy (at least half the male clergy). It consumed much of a generation of gay men my own age, whose presence is still missed so much. It pushed MCC to the wall. Many other institutional, organizational issues had to be put on

[23] For an historical account and documentation of this, see Joshua L. Love, *Uncommon Hope* (Trafford Publishing, 2009).

hold. We had to deal with death, eternal life, healing and faith. We had to learn how to live in perpetual, never-ending grief and continuing to minister and grow. It became the lens through which many came to see all of reality. MCC incarnated hope and solidarity by calling ourselves "The Church with AIDS," a powerful alternative ecclesiology. The Body of Christ had AIDS, and MCC was the visible reminder.

One of the things that is amazing about these years (about 1983 to 2000), is that it never once occurred to the leaders of MCC that it could collapse, die or fail. MCC was only fourteen years old, a small, young, barely viable institution when AIDS hit. MCC was actually bigger and stronger, in some ways, by the time it ended, though the negative impact is still being felt. When the protease inhibitors began to work, and the dying slowed to a trickle (in the West), MCC went into a kind of post-traumatic shock as an organization. Some of our churches did as well. Some froze and died. The exhaustion was palpable.

This was probably the time MCC was in the most danger, and still couldn't afford to know it. For several years, there was little willingness to do much of anything new about AIDS; and those with AIDS, who struggled to take new and sometimes harsh medications, wondered what had happened to MCC's zeal and activism. We learned the term, "compassion fatigue," and knew we had it. There were voices clamoring about the need for new "leadership" and "vision." Then in 1999 Troy announced his resignation as Moderator of MCC in six years. A few years after that, after years of conflict, our largest and wealthiest church left MCC, and eventually joined the United Church of Christ. Bottom line, they didn't believe MCC would thrive in the aftermath of AIDS and

leadership transition. It needed to cling to a stronger, wealthier, more middle class lifeboat. They left. MCC survived. But, no question, it shook us.

The Church with AIDS is still needed, in a time where we are losing ground in prevention and treatment, especially in Africa, in Eastern Europe, and in Washington, D.C. There are people who will come to know the radically inclusive message we preach because they have HIV/AIDS, and no church in their country will welcome them, or reach out to so many who are living and dying with HIV/AIDS. Our unique history with HIV/AIDS positions us, and gives us the mandate to continue to be in solidarity.

The Human Rights Church

As the new millennium dawned, the world was changing and decentralizing. The Web and the internet and virtual technology radically changed cultures and communications. MCC went through leadership changes and moved into a new structure meant to help MCC survive the founder's retirement.

Our new global structure tried to correct a myopic, Western, colonial, U.S.-centric world view and organizational model for MCC. It simply flattened the world into eight Regions, with more or less equal resources to do the work. Immediately, in a post 9/11 world, MCC had to begin to wrestle with a changing world economy, and struggle to financially resource a truly global movement.

Because of this new structure and leadership, MCC began doing work in Eastern Europe, and we were given the label "The Human Rights Church," by activists there. MCC jumped into the middle of the religiously-based homophobia standing in the way of human rights for LGBT people in many countries. We made common cause there with

those with disabilities, and women struggling for reproductive freedom. We were the only church willing to express solidarity with a young, new movement of queer, spiritual and human rights activists.

This human rights and justice emphasis is the new, third era in MCC's forty-two year history. The "trust task" is to deal with being an authentic, spiritual, courageous global queer spiritual movement in a world of economic and political injustice created by the remnants of colonialism and its ally, "global capitalism."

MCC must be trustworthy partners with human rights organizations who may be suspicious of religious groups. Balancing the re-invention and sustainability of MCC in North America with the needs of an emerging global "market" is a major task. MCC must remain true to our identity and legacy. We must continue to find ways to do whatever it takes to strengthen our movement for the generations to come. There are hundreds of smaller cities all over North America that need an MCC church, center or presence that do not have one today.

Today, MCC is deeply involved with exploding, young queer, spiritual, activist communities in Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, Uganda, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, Pakistan, Iceland, Brazil and all over Latin America, Romania, Moldova, Ukraine, Russia, Turkey, and Kazakhstan. The North and the West are aging, which MCC reflects in those places. But the Global South and East are young, and getting younger. This is where MCC's destiny and future lies, in the intersection of our human rights mission and establishing and nurturing new communities of faith globally.

Depending on the context, MCC will continue to be the Gay Church, the Church with AIDS, and the Human Rights Church. What kind of leadership ethos, leadership training, theology of trustworthy leadership will help MCC adapt to the demands and opportunities to be this emerging, ecumenical church in the 21st century? This is the question I hope to answer in this project.

CHAPTER TWO

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRUST

In his ground breaking speech to the Muslim world, from Cairo, Egypt, the President of the United States, Barack Obama, set about addressing and correcting "years of mistrust."[1] Distilling our problems with the Muslim world that way was a powerful articulation that opened up history in that moment. The President was signaling that *trust*, in all its simplicity and complexity, is the major human challenge of the 21st century as we pursue peace.

New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman, says, in *The World is Flat:*

> Without trust, there is no open society, because there are not enough police to patrol every opening in an open society. Without trust there can also be no flat world, because it is trust that allows us to take down walls, remove barriers, and eliminate friction at borders. Trust is essential for a flat world.[2]

Theologian of hope Jurgen Moltmann reminds us that:

> The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), as well as the Earth Charter (1992) provide the internationally recognized basis for trust among the countries of the United Nations.[3]

For a church that sees its mission as "tearing down walls and building up hope," and which has global ambitions, these are powerful messages. In recent history, we have seen the flouting of the Geneva Conventions, which threatens that fragile, global trust.

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[1]Barack Obama's speech to the Muslim World in Cairo, the New York Times, www.nytimes.com/2009/06/04obama.text.html? r=1 (Accessed February 23, 2011)

[2] Thomas Friedman, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty First Century (*New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 394.

[3] Jurgen Moltmann, "Control is Good – Trust is Better; Freedom and Security in a 'Free World.'" *Theology Today,* 62 No 4 (Ja 2006), 468.

Nations that flagrantly disregard these agreements says Moltmann, "lose trustworthiness among the nations and peoples."[4] What he does not say, is how much these agreements are needed because today's global economy has been created out of a terrible history of colonialism, economic and political oppression and wars. We are interdependent as never before, as the recent economic crisis has shown us. We need to find ways to trust, even with so much history of betrayal of trust. And, we must value **being trustworthy** more than being rich or powerful or in control. This is a word for nations, and for organizations.

Mohammed Yunnus' account of creating a banking system based on trust[5] is a revolutionary example of a countercultural focus on trust. He had to convince bankers to lend very small amounts of capital and trust to the poorest of the poor, who had no collateral.[6] His theory was that the desperately poor would pay back the loans at a higher rate (it was 98%, astonishingly high) because they could not afford to not to be able to borrow again.[7] The Grameen bank also decided to work on a basis of peer supervision and support of loan repayment, to make the loans really manageable, and to avoid large sum repayments. These methods, tailored to the needs and culture of the poorest, proved very effective over time, engendering trust.[8] In fact, "In contrast (to every other bank), Grameen assumes that every borrower is honest. There are no legal instruments between the lenders and the borrowers. We were convinced that the bank should be built on

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[4] Ibid., 469.
[5] Mohammed Yunnus, *Banker to the Poor: Micro-lending and the Battle Against World Poverty.*(Public Affairs, 2003).
[6] Ibid., 55-57.
[7] Ibid., 58.
[8] Ibid., 61-62.

human trust, not on meaningless paper contracts ....(and) our experience with bad debt is less than 1 percent."[9]

This system flies in the face of everything we have been taught to believe about money and lending and the purpose of banks. As the Grameen Bank helped the poorest women in the world, Yunnus came to believe that access to capital should be a basic human right.[10] His globally successful model proves that banking that is community based, and rooted in trust can be practical and successful. In fact, more than anything else, Yunnus sees himself as a teacher, empowering people to change their own lives.[11] Through his profound discovery, **trust** won a Nobel Peace Prize, and the lives of millions of people have been changed forever. Commercial banks, today, are starting to lend to poor people for profit, because their record for repayment is superior to the record of the wealthy.

The most eye-opening and discouraging thing about his book was his conviction that all the "aid" programs in the world simply end up creating dependency, generations of impoverishment and ultimately serve only to enrich the already rich corporations and governments.[12] This has to be one of the great, under-documented scandals of the 20th and 21st centuries. Yunnus' contention that "poverty is not created by the poor...but by the structures of society and the policies pursued by society,"[13] is a further demonstration that when mistrust is built into systems, it does not protect lives, but destroys them.

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[9] Ibid., 70.
[10] Ibid., 247-253.
[11] Ibid., 103.
[12] Ibid., 140-146.
[13] Ibid., 205.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "our distrust is very expensive."[14] Whole industries (e.g., elaborate home and office security systems) have been created to make a profit on distrust. Agreements that were solemnized by a handshake just a century or two ago (or still are, in some cultures) require lawyers and contracts and are contested in courts, in long, expensive processes. The growing field of risk management is a testimony to the levels of mistrust that pervade business and organizations. Churches have had to dramatically change how they do business, and conform to new ways of doing things that challenge us in terms of our core values.

Clearly, the Roman Catholic Church could have benefited from more appropriate risk management practices as the "good old boys'" methods of covering up for predatory clergy crashed under the weight of the cumulative evidence of criminal behavior. In some ways, those basic risk management practices are the lowest level of providing more trust in a system, and, of course, even they can end up simply being used to protect the perpetrators and their institutions. Restoring trust, for the Catholic hierarchy, goes way beyond having basic risk management and professional screening procedures: it would require deep, thorough, self-searching, in the leadership and in the institution itself. It would demand the humility to ask forgiveness, and to take transparent, corrective measures to protect children. It would require a sincere and deep look at the Church's distorted, patriarchal view of sexuality and spirituality, the equality of women and men, and what leadership in the 21st century really demands.

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[14] As cited in Stephen M. R. Covey and Rebecca R. Miller, *The Speed of Trust: The One Thing That Changes Everything* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 2006), 14.

The economist and philosopher Francis Fukuyama said, "Widespread distrust in a society... imposes a kind of tax on all forms of economic activity, a tax that high-trust societies do not have to pay."[15] The "trust tax" in our time seems to be getting steeper and steeper.[16] Low trust organizations are costly to operate, and are self-sabotaging.

Despite the importance of trust in organizational life, in the literature on organizational development the subject of trust is mostly treated as an aspect, even a minor aspect, of organizational life. One example is a popular book called *Virtual Teams*,[17] in which trust has just four pages in a chapter, towards the end, on values. There is only one book on the topic of business, organizations and trust that I could find, Covey's *The Speed of Trust,* not a scholarly work, but valuable for the creativity and synthesis of ideas.

Definitions

Definitions of **trust** are fascinating and a little slippery. Oftentimes, a definition is simply a synonym, like "confidence."[18] One scholar writes that "trust is not static, it is dynamic, it is created."[19]

Margaret Wheatley writes eloquently about trust and organizations, saying that in "trusting life to organize itself," we benefit if we "give up the role of master creator and

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[15] Francis Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 27-28.
[16] Covey, 22-24.
[17] Jessica Lipnack, and Jeffrey Stamps, *Virtual Teams* (John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1997), 224-228.
[18] Covey, 5.
[19] Harrison D. Knight, Larry L. Cummings, Norman Chevary, "Trust Formation in New Organizational Relationships," paper given at the Information and Decision Sciences Workshop, University of Minnesota. University of Minnesota – Curtis L. Carlson School of Management, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1995, 5.

move into the dance of life."[20] Her understanding of trust is that it is a process. She says that *organizational structure* is not a thing, but a process as well. Her organic approach to organizations and trust struck a powerful chord with me, as MCC is trying to understand the relationship of our structure to our values, to our sustainability and future success. The sense that something deeper is required, beyond tinkering mechanically with structure: that something spiritual, a leap forward, requires great trust, is more germane to the kind of change we are experiencing today in MCC.

I resonated with psychologist Jim Meehan's effort to define trust, between individuals: "Having spent many years trying to define the essentials of trust, I arrived at the position that if two people could say two things to each other and mean them, then there was the basis for trust. The two things were "I mean you no harm" and "I seek your greatest good."[21] This, then, is more than "confidence." It is about the intention of another towards us, in a dynamic relationship.

Trust, then, is not a noun, it is a profound, relational dynamic, an activity, a process. A process that includes its polar opposite, mistrust, or healthy skepticism and suspicion. This is in some ways, the hardest thing to grasp: that trust is not an all or nothing proposition, but, truly, a dance and a process.

Knight, Cummings and Chevary, claim that "trusting a person means believing that when offered the chance, he or she is not likely to behave in a way that is damaging to us."[22] This is a definition based only on what we hope will **not** happen. Trust, then is

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[20] Margaret J. Wheatley, *Finding Our Way* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2005), 112.
[21] Covey, 80.
[22] As cited by, Knight, et al., 1.

in part about what we hope will or will not happen in the future. It is as future-oriented as it is a description of the present. Mistrust, then, is also mistrust of what *might* happen.

Moltmann also insists that there is no trust without risk,[23] that trust by its very nature implies putting oneself in the hands of another who could potentially cause harm. Trust, therefore, is not trust if there is a 100% guarantee that nothing will go wrong. **Trust is, in part, about a leap of faith, of confidence, of hope.** Therefore, it is not only social, psychological, but spiritual.

What, for instance, made the masses of people in Egypt trust that this was their moment in history, their time to risk standing up to a thirty year regime and say "no more?" What had kept them from doing this in the days, months and years before? Was it the encouraging sight of Tunisians successfully driving out their dictator? Was it the cumulative frustrations of a growing, young, educated but unemployed citizenry? Was it Twitter and Facebook, access to the world and to each other in this way? What produced that amazing symbol of mutual trust and support as Muslims encircled persecuted Coptic Christians as they prayed in the square, and Christians then returned the favor?[24] This new movement in the Arab world is a complex leap of faith and hope that required trust of each other, and mistrust of all they had been taught to believe.

Are We Less Trusting?

There is also debate about whether our world is becoming more or less trusting. The rate at which we are insuring ourselves against acts of mistrust seems to say we are

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[23] Moltmann, 467.

[24] Sonia Verma, "Coptic Christians shoulder to shoulder with Muslims in Tahrir Square" www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/crises-in-egypt/coptic-christians, (February 7, 2011), accessed February 23, 2011.

less trusting. Yet, others propose that it is our carelessness in trusting without enough information that leads us to create more structures and boundaries around trust.

Nick Spencer writes about trust in the context of business in a post-Enron era. Enron was the Houston based company that became the first in a long line of companies that "cooked" their books, to look more profitable. The heads of the company profited while shareholders and rank and file employees were devastated. He cites statistics in Great Britain that, "virtually all institutions and professions are trusted less than twenty years ago."[25] He points to corporate scandals and dis-ease about globalization. He also points out that while we claim to mistrust the media, we still patronize it. Spencer reminds us that we trust by necessity and still get in our cars.

Stephen Covey points to these statistics in the United States: " a 2005 Harris poll revealed that only 22% of those surveyed tend to trust the media, only 8% trust political parties, only 27% trust the government, and only 12% trust big companies."[26] He did not include statistics about trust in churches or pastors. But, we all are aware of the ways in which the behavior or misbehavior of clergy and church leaders have left many people feeling mistrustful and disconnected from religion. Decades of such scandals have produced the phenomenon that while a vast majority of Americans, for instance, identify as "spiritual," fewer and fewer attend or join churches or places of worship.

Onora O'Neill a well-known British philosopher lectured about current issues in trust and public life, focusing on the press. She speaks of the mixed evidence about

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[25] Nick Spencer, *Rebuilding Trust in Business: Enron and Beyond* (London: Grove Books Ltd. 2006), 4.
[26] Covey, 11.

whether or not we (the public, or at least the British public) are actually less trusting, or simply trying to trust more wisely.[27]

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, in his recent book, *Tokens of Trust*, takes up this theme as well.[28] On the one hand, he cites the "unusual amount of suspicion in public life" – religion, government, health care, and on the other hand sticks up for the "edge of critical response in every democracy" that is healthy mistrust.[29] He quotes the O'Neill lecture, but also tries to connect the dilemmas about public trust to our need for spiritual solid ground and home. Williams, head of the Anglican Communion, leads a global denomination visibly and viscerally beset by problems of trust on a spiritual and organizational level. I appreciated his point of view that the concept of trust is essential to embracing a Christian concept of God, and of the role of Jesus Christ.

Williams agrees with other writers in affirming that Christian "belief" is not primarily about intellectual assent, but, more fundamentally, and organically, about trust.[30] It is trust, and not belief, that people yearn for, and seek, in a spiritual or religious connection.

A lot of what we call "mistrust" is about not being in control.[31] Today it is difficult to get our hearts or minds around the enormous volume of knowledge that we depend on for our daily lives. Post-modern life is dominated by the sense of being out of

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[27] O'Nora O'Neill, "A Question of Trust: The BBC Reith Lectures 2002." (Cambridge University Press, 2002).
[28] Rowan Williams, *Tokens of Trust: An Introduction to Christian Beliefs* (Canterbury Press, 2007).
[29] Ibid., 4.
[30] Ibid., 5.
[31] Ibid., 4.

control much of the time. The volume of decisions and demands overwhelm even those who are bright, successful and privileged.

The topic of trust is becoming more visible as a topic of research and inquiry. This was confirmed by a recent issue of *Harvard Business Review*, in which the spotlight was on "Rebuilding Trust." Psychologist Roderick Kramer explored trust through the story of Bernie Madoff, the convicted perpetrator of a 65 billion dollar Ponzi scheme.[32] Although we have been told that "trust has been touted as the powerful lubricant that keeps the economic wheels turning,"[33] and that there are many benefits to increasing trust, there may be another side to this coin.

Kramer brings up the fact that to trust can be a strength **or** a weakness, depending on whether we are dealing with trustworthy or untrustworthy people.[34] He says this to counter the current, emerging, but maybe too simplistic view, that increasing trust is good for business. In a world of increasing complexity, where we rely more and more on experts, it is important to know that just trusting alone is not enough – we need to trust **wisely**.

Kramer talks about human beings entering the world "hard-wired" to be dependent and to trust; and that this has been shown to be scientifically significant in our success as a species.[35] Even though people say they trust institutions and organizations less and less, does human behavior really bear that out? Kramer posits that a kind of "presumptive trust," a less conscious, automatic trust, overall tends to serve us well –

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[32] Roderick Kramer, "Rethinking Trust," *Harvard Business Review*, June 2009, 60-77.
[33] Ibid., 6.
[34] Ibid., 70.
[35] Ibid.

until it doesn't.[36] In other words, unless we are damaged at an early age, we have a "bias towards trust."[37] This bias can make us very vulnerable to the kind of scam Bernie Madoff pulled off on some very bright people. We trust people, sometimes, just because someone we know or trust also trusts them.

This is also known as "dispositional trust," which is trusting "beyond the personal.... this is in a sense 'attitudinal.'In other words, a person may be predisposed to assume people are generally trustworthy, or even that one gets better results generally if one trusts than if one does not."[38] So, even with evidence to the contrary, I may choose to trust because I am predisposed to do so, in my personality, or as a habit. One may also be overly trusting because of a reputation someone has, which may or may not be accurate or current.[39] Our basis of trust may be more anecdotal than factual. And we may be seduced by someone else's claims if we are already predisposed to trust.

Mohammed Yunnus claimed that deciding to trust the poor was a good decision to make, in terms of the health and strength of the Grameen bank. Whatever minor troubles there were are outweighed by the benefits of extending trust. It is interesting that Yunnus' recent troubles in courts in Bangladesh come not from the poor, who are his base, but from the politicians, those in power, who are threatened by his criticisms. And, how genuinely surprised and wounded he seems by it, though he is so aware of the power of the corrupt whom he seeks to expose and defeat.[40]

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[36] Ibid., 71.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Knight, et. al, 13.
[39] Ibid., 14 .
[40] Lydia Polgreen, "Microcredit Pioneer Faces and Inquiry in Bangladesh," *New York Times*, Sunday, January 11, 2011, 10.

Writing about our tendency to see what we want to see, Kramer claims that we often do not see evidence that is contradictory, which is called a "confirmation bias." This bias colludes with and undergirds poor judgment.[41]

I have also thought and observed in thirty years of pastoring, that those whose trust was abused as children have their trust "antenna" seriously damaged. They swing between the poles of being too trusting or unable to trust almost at all. This reminds me of the "all or nothing" orientation of alcoholics, or adult children of alcoholics. Because their capacity to discern if someone is trustworthy or not is damaged, the default position is to be suspicious of everyone, or to simply fall for everything. This "disability" requires establishing an appropriate and trusting relationship with at least one other person, who is trustworthy, to begin repairing and restoring that capacity to trust wisely and well.

The implications for MCC are very serious. Studies have confirmed that LGBT people, in general have a much higher incidence of childhood abuse or trauma, perhaps because they were targeted by family, peers, or other adults. Some psychologists saw this as a "causal" connection to homosexuality, rather than a consequence, which supported the "disease model" of homosexuality. With a much higher percentage of people whose "trust antennas" have been damaged, MCC has to focus even more vigilantly on creating and sustaining valid, reasonable, verifiable trust system-wide.

Kramer offers seven rules for "tempering trust,"[42] ways to help people trust more wisely in our complex world. Those rules are, briefly: know yourself; start small; write an

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[41] Kramer, 71.

escape clause; send strong signals; recognize the other person's dilemma; look at roles as well as people; and remain vigilant and always question.[43] These are very useful for a methodology of building trust or restoring it. In a counter-intuitive way, remaining vigilant and always asking questions, which sounds like *mis*-trust, is really a doorway to trust.

Kramer also refers to a "science of trust"[44] what he calls "an interdisciplinary movement of neuro-economists, behavioral economists and psychologists."[45] There is a spiritual dimension to all of this embedded in his rules and reflections, and it would be fascinating to expand that interdisciplinary movement to include religion and theology.

Trust, Questioning Authority, and Freedom

I take issue with Jack Gibb, a social psychologist, quoted by William Hobgood, "who studied trust development in hundreds of groups, (and) says that trust 'implies instinctive, unquestioning belief in and reliance upon something.'"[46] Trust is required for individual and organizational health, yet we must be aware of the dangers of misplaced trust. Wise trusting and mistrusting can both be healthy. Questioning authority is a practice that makes trustworthy leadership possible. Claiming freedom to question authority made a church like MCC possible.

Is trust something that is or should be just granted a priori, to God, or to human beings or institutions, simply because of their reputations or status? Or does trust have to be earned, and proven, and if so, how often? Does trust simply accrue when someone or

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[42] Ibid., 74.
[43] Ibid., 74-77.
[44] Ibid., 77.
[45] Ibid.
[46] William Chris Hobgood, *Welcoming Resistance* (Alban Institute, 2001), 18.

some group is "competent?" Or is it more than competence? Covey claims that we each have a "trust account" with different accounts for each relationship with individuals and groups.[47] Is there something in human DNA, or brain structure, as Kramer says, that sets us up to trust others, and perhaps a higher power? Or, is trust more about our early childhood development, as psychologists such as Erik Erikson posited decades ago?[48]

Jurgen Moltmann, speaking at the intersection of public policy, government and international relations, organizations and theology, says: "Trust is the necessary habit of freedom, its living space."[49] He connects trust and truth, and says that "only trust can bring freedom in a society."[50] His theory is that the more control a government or society asserts, the less trust there is, and vice-versa, and the less truth is valued as well. Seeking total control is ultimately destructive and futile, as he observes in the latter years of Soviet-style rule, which still prevails in some places.

This connection of trust, truth and freedom is fundamental to MCC's origins and mission, "tearing down walls and building up hope." Without making a connection between trust and justice, there can be no hope for the future.

Trust and Justice

In *Virtual Teams,* the prescription for creating trust in teams is to teach them to trust the people, the process and the communication/information links.[51] What is often missing is a trustworthy process. This is often where issues of justice arise. Are processes

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[47] Covey, 131-132.
[48] Moltmann, 467, referring to Erik H. Erikson, *Identity and the Life-Cycle* (New York: International Universities Press, 1959).
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid., 466.
[51] Lipnack and Stamps, 226.

in the organization, in the church fair? Perceived as fair? The recent Supreme Court case about the promotions of fire fighters in New Haven, based on written tests, brings this issue of real and perceived fairness to the forefront. Most places now do not rely solely on certain kinds of tests alone, but a variety of factors, in promotion, because of cultural issues and other considerations. On the surface, a procedure may look fair, but truth and real fairness are often more complex than a superficial view would have us believe.

Recently, about 250 LGBT leaders met with President Obama. There are tensions in our community around people trusting any President. Some want to trust this President because they are very invested in a Democratic President, in him in particular, and just will not abide people speaking up about missteps or promises not yet fulfilled. Others, who are so sure that no President will ever really come through for us are cynical, and not really willing to give him a chance. In a high-pressure, high stakes political world, which focuses on results, it is hard for people to trust a process, to wait for justice.

It is also important to acknowledge that, as the first African American President, he has been subject to horrifically violent rhetoric based on the feeling or misperception that he is really "not one of us," not white, and not really American, or really Christian. Evidently, one must be Christian to be President of the United States, and the kind of Christian that certain Christians say is acceptable. In so far as queer people are marginalized, no matter our gender identity, religion, race or class, we have some appreciation for how the President is misperceived.

Racism complicated the LGBT community's relationship with the President. Much of the leadership in our community, secular and religious, has been, historically, white.

Racism, and Islamaphobia are issues we have to deal with in our own movement. Some may avoid criticizing the President because they do not want to appear racist. Others may want the President's support without also offering support, or caring about the other issues the President has to confront. They have little understanding of the need to work in coalition, in solidarity with the struggles of others to whom the President, and all of us are accountable.

Is it wise to trust this President? To support him as he balances turning the economy around, solving health care and dealing with an Arab world that is exploding just two years after he made his Cairo speech? Can we give the President space to do things his way, and allow his views (of gay marriage, for instance), "to evolve?" Where are our issues in the line-up? Where should they be? How is the emerging clout, economic and political power of the LGBT community handled? The President is charming; he and his wife are visibly comfortable with LGBT people.[52] He speaks passionately and convincingly enough. How much of our support is the thrill for us of being close to celebrities and power? What will we be tempted to give up or compromise for that? In that room with the President and his wife were African American LGBT folks who have added complications. A year before he was elected President, a majority of African Americans were for Hillary Clinton, because they did not trust that white Americans would vote for a black man. When the white voters of Iowa shocked the African American community in this country, they began to get on board, and believe

[52] The first male White House social secretary is a gay man! *New York Times,* February 26, 2011.

that history was about to be made, and that justice was possible. Sometimes, we say we do not want what we do not believe is possible. Then we have to catch up!

For all minority groups, for all those who have experienced oppression, there is a tension between trust and justice. To keep trusting and trusting as justice is delayed or denied is not wise. It is demeaning to have to trust others for **our** justice. Sometimes we have to learn how to take our place, assert our right to complete equality, not accept the counsel to just wait patiently. Do we believe that justice will automatically come? Or do we seek and fight for justice, and trust that in so doing, it will come, at last?

People in MCC, like those of other minorities, are very "justice sensitive," expecting just treatment only from those in our group. Some anticipate the worst in every encounter, personally or politically. We may cling to idealized views of our group as our "hold" on sanity, connection and justice.

In the LGBT community we often treat every other LGBT person as a "shirt-tail relative."[53] It is like we have a family resemblance, somehow. It would make sense if there is some DNA factor in sexual orientation and gender identity, but that is not the only factor. I remember my first time in South Africa, hoping to meet LGBT Christians for the very first time, in 1993. One evening, I was waiting for two young men I had never seen before. Suddenly, I saw them, wearing the jeans and white T-shirt uniform of gay men in San Francisco, but it was more than that: their body language, their sexuality and other more subtle signals told me they were gay, and they were "my people." They

[53] I learned this from Southern friends: a "shirt-tail relative" is someone you are vaguely related to, in ways that make them familial, though you may not know exactly why and it may be awkward or unhelpful to try to discover!

were shocked and mystified that I knew who they were (!), but it touched me and comforted me, so far away from home. They were complete strangers, but I trustingly got in a car with them, and we were instantly communicating with amazing rapport.

This is called "unit grouping" trust.[54] The concept is that when you become part of a group, at least at first, you automatically are inclined to trust them a little more because of the sense of mutual belonging. Perhaps it is also the sense that one's destiny is tied to the destiny of others in the group that one's hope for justice is bound up with theirs.

The other factor is power. If one definition of trust is that it means "depending" on another or a group, then trust is linked to power. As one author says, "Since trust means a willingness to depend, one who trusts is willing to place the other in a situational position of power over him/her."[55] Being part of a minority means that to some degree, you are dependent on the majority and its framework for reality or for access to resources. Members of minority groups, because of that dependency on the majority framework, have to trust the dominant group for at least some things, whether they want to or not, whether they are emotionally disposed to or not. If the majority are not oppressive or abusive, William Hobgood says, "trust is the quality that makes 'good power' work."[56] If not, of course, then, trusting in that oppressive power sets a minority group up to collude in their own oppression.

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[54] Knight, et. al., 23.
[55] Ibid., 9-10.
[56] Hobgood, 118.

MCC's Religious Context and Consciousness:

MCC has at least two religious, institutional contexts that are very relevant to the subject of organizational trust. The first is our Evangelical-Pentecostal religious roots, and the fact that at least 40% of MCCer's, globally, are from a Roman Catholic background. Both these kinds of backgrounds, from more authoritarian religious systems, present special challenges with institutional trust.

Those from an evangelical background were often not so free. They were called "free church" because they were not state churches, and were from the "dissenting" wing of the Protestant Reformation. The combined legacies of Puritanism, Calvinism, fundamentalism and the more recent Pentecostalism (all very different from each other) have an enormous, cumulative impact. They created churches and denominations that often uncritically perpetuated male authority which elevated "obedience" above other moral imperatives.[57] They did this in ways that were different from Roman Catholicism, relying more heavily on scripture and the idealizing of a family system with the "man as head of household" for the sources of authority.

MCC's context of freedom, in contrast, was that of experimentation and openness. We brought our church backgrounds, assumptions about church, theology, the Bible, authority and church organization with us. We were to foster unity in essentials, and diversity in everything else. Our struggles with control, versus our stated value of freedom, were intense. Theological diversity delighted some, but scared others, especially those who had not completely recovered from fundamentalism. Many in MCC were

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[57] Wyndy Corbin-Reuschling, "'Trust and Obey:' The Danger of Obedience as Duty in Evangelical Ethics," *Journal for the Society of Christian Ethics.* 25 no 2, 2005, 59-77.

desperate to be considered truly "Christian," sometimes as a symptom of unhealed homophobia.

At MCC's fourth General Conference, in 1973, the first I ever attended, we passed MCC's first by-laws, which included a Statement of Faith. That awkwardly cobbled together statement, claimed (almost ridiculously, then) that MCC "moved in the mainstream of Christianity," and embraced the historic creeds, Apostles and Nicene. Then, someone stood up and asked to amend by adding the Athanasian Creed. It passed handily, only because no one wanted to admit we were not familiar with it! When we got home, many of us looked it up, with its language about the church, "outside of which there is no salvation," and promptly came back and removed it the following year. We wanted balance, doctrinal ordinariness and radical inclusivity in our key statement of belief.

It was this insistence that drew the fury of the growing Religious Right in the U.S. If we had not claimed at least a little orthodoxy, if we had not enthusiastically claimed the Bible, we would have been a passing interest. Our insistence on connecting to tradition drew violent responses, hate crimes and lots of opposition.[58]

As we grew, and quite rapidly, negotiating what we meant by "Christian" often took time and courage we didn't have. Some crisis was always bringing us together, setting aside the questions about each other's faith and theological boundaries until another time. When I became Moderator, we created a new Theologies Team for MCC just to get the conversation going again, creating safe spaces to talk about our rich,

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[58] Nancy L. Wilson, "Outing the Sodomite," from *Our Tribe: Queer Folk, God, Jesus and the Bible* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 163-208.

emerging theological life and contributions. There has been a wonderful response to their work.

Evangelicalism, Pentecostalism and fundamentalism were all rooted in an "outsider" status, despised and even persecuted as religious outcasts who were suspicious of traditional institutions. They were also rooted among working class or poor people. These movements then often gave away their power to their own trusted leaders, in unquestioning obedience and loyalty. They believed they needed strong leadership to sustain them in their minority social location, but then allowed that leadership to avoid accountability. MCC is also a minority, largely working class church movement,[59] which is why leadership accountability is important. It is why we want our leaders and people to be well educated; and why we sometimes resist education.

In our celebrity-soaked culture, religious leaders are often celebrities, or treated that way. Celebrities are not elected or accountable. They are free to abuse power, and can be adored or abused by their fans. In many ways, Troy Perry was and is a celebrity in the LGBT community who has had considerable media attention and visibility in his life. Fortunately, he had the integrity and humility required of a level five leader[60] that kept him from abusing that power and authority in MCC.

Forty percent of MCCer's grew up Roman Catholic, and are well acquainted with the present scandals involving sexual abuse scandals, all too many of them first hand. On

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[59] This is, by the way, one reason education has become so important for MCC leaders, as education is a way to "lift ourselves up" in terms of our religious and class origins. This is why honoring Troy Perry with a doctorate at EDS was so powerful.

[60] Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap . . .and Others Don't* (Collins Business, 2001). A level five leader is one who "builds enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will," 20 and pages 39-40.

an anecdotal basis, I have been quite overwhelmed with the number of men and women in MCC who have been molested by priests and Protestant clergy as children. Those who were gay often kept quiet about it because they were afraid of exposing their own sexuality in the process. The levels of shame, guilt and mistrust of clergy are quite staggering, and make being an MCC pastor challenging.

I am not sure why it is that LGBT people seem to have been targeted more for such abuse than most people. At one time, that was viewed causally – that such abuse produced homosexual or "deviant" behavior. Of course I do not agree with that theory. But, I do wonder if LGBT people, who as children are sometimes isolated and targeted for bullying, are not also targeted for sexual abuse by adults.

When I was pastoring MCC Los Angeles, a woman came to my office, upset with me. The Sunday before, she was sure that in the middle of my sermon, I told her to leave the church. Of course, I did no such thing. She seemed genuinely surprised when I told her that I had not done that, and then broke down and told me about having been in foster care with a Protestant (fundamentalist) clergy and his wife, and being molested by him for years. She had not been to a church as an adult. Just coming to MCC triggered a breakdown/breakthrough in facing her abuse. Thus began a long road of healing. The amount of this kind of projection that MCC clergy find ourselves experiencing is usually more subtle, but staggering at times.

Dr. Carolyn "Dusty" Pruitt, after pastoring in MCC for many years, did her doctoral thesis about the statistical correlation between child sexual abuse and

authoritarian religion, having been abused by her Southern Baptist pastor father.[61] If most MCCer's come from a more authoritarian religious background, then, also they were more likely to have been exposed to sexual abuse, even before they were targeted for being queer.

Those abused by Catholic priests are often some of the most challenging, in terms of the level and severity of abuse. Some cases were cruel, sadistic and brutal. Others were grossly inappropriate. All were harmful and destructive of the tender, emerging faith and relationship with God and the church. The church abandoned them into the hands of untrustworthy priests who broke their hearts and sometimes their bodies as well. To become pastor or priest to such persons takes a lot of patience. For these victims to open themselves up to a vocation is even more work.

Catholics or "recovering Catholics," in MCC love and value key Catholic concepts: frequent communion; liturgy and aesthetics; a sense of being a part of the Body of Christ all around the world; the value of education; a very active concept of the communion of saints. Contemporary Catholic theologies, such as Liberation Theology, are very appealing and adaptable to MCC's context.

Bill Kondrath has talked about the tension between accountability systems in organizations, especially churches, and the concept of loyalty.[62] All of us in MCC have seen churches that seemed unwilling to really allow a pastor to lead at all. Such churches

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[61] Carolyn "Dusty" Pruitt, "But Thou Shalt Forget the Shame of Thy Youth: A Study of Authoritarianism, Religiosity and Child Sexual Abuse." A doctoral thesis completed at Claremont School of Theology, 1987, www.dustypruitt.com.

[62] Bill Kondrath, conversation, in our class, "Creativity, Conflict and Change." The idea is that there is a continuum between loyalty and accountability, and one can place members of any congregation on that continuum in any particular conflict.

may have had unresolved trust issues with previous pastors, or are led by laity who bring those issues forward with them from other experiences. On the other hand, there are churches that continue to be unwisely loyal to a pastor who has betrayed trust, but the church does not want to face that, and the problems continue.

Here, then the issue of trusting the denomination comes in. Creating trusting relationship between pastors, lay leaders and denominational officials makes all the difference when they are needed to help the church face problems, to intervene in conflicts, or challenge them to change and grow. Can Elders be ecclesial, that is, exercising appointing or affilitiating authority and also serve as a consultant; or as a pastor to a pastor and their family? Can Elders be pastoral, but not conflict adverse, in case they have to talk the pastor into resigning or going into treatment; or talk to a church matriarch or patriarch into backing off?

Models of Trust in Organizations:

There is a lot of material that describes trust, the process of creating and sustaining trust, and the process of repairing trust. There is material on how to trust more wisely, and what the elements of trustworthy leadership might be. We are still a little poor in the creation of models of trust, especially for communities with special issues around trust, because of oppression or abuse.

One metaphor is to view trust as a **bridge**. A bridge is a thing, a noun, but "bridging" is an activity. Trust is an emotional, psychological, spiritual bridge from isolation and powerlessness, to connection, freedom and empowerment. The whole practice of psychotherapy is predicated on helping a client trust enough, hopefully wisely

enough, to be able to heal. This is why betrayal by a therapist is doubly wounding – to be wounded in the process of trying to restore, repair basic trust, is, indeed, very hard to recover from. Clients find that it is not so much that they cannot trust a therapist anymore, but they cannot trust **themselves** to choose a good one. It is the undermining of one's trust in one's own judgment that is often the most humiliating and damaging aspect of such betrayal.

In one sense, coming out is a bridge for LGBT people. From where we were, in a closet, we had to risk crossing over to a new land, a new way of living and being. But the bridge image is limited in that it gives the illusion that one crosses a bridge and that's that. Trust, and building trust (like coming out!) is an ongoing process, that is never completely finished, it is a lifelong process. In organizations, it is an aspect of life that requires vigilance and attention at every juncture.

My partner Paula has an image she uses with couples in her psychotherapy practice, called **the trust cake.** If you were to look at a round cake from the top, you could divide the cake into pieces, depending on which issues were "bigger" for you, more important (saving money, sexual fidelity, telling the truth, showing affection and paying attention, sharing the burden of household work, raising children together, etc.). Then you would think about how deeply (looking at the side of the cake) you trust him or her for each issue (or slice of cake). Thus there are two dimensions, the relative importance of each issue, and the depth of trust presently felt around that issues.

Another metaphor or model is that **trust that is analogous to our skin as it grows.** Learning to trust wisely and be trustworthy is important to our social,

psychological, spiritual selves as our skin is to our body. The skin is, in fact, our largest organ, and yet, most of us are unaware that it is an organ. We are less aware of it when it is healthy and functions well. Our skin grows with us as we grow up, much as our capacity to trust wisely also needs to grow.

Our skin is our first defense system against harm and disease. Damaged skin is painful and opens us up to disease and infection. Skin is a powerful, organic boundary which loosens with age. Sometimes it becomes thin and becomes more vulnerable. When we are injured, our skin is sometimes scarred, even for life. If too much of our skin is damaged, we die.

Our skin is also an erotic locus. Skin is the site of touching and being touched. Our skin and nerves respond, negatively and positively to the touch of others, in a way that deeply and mysteriously determined. We connect with others, powerfully, with our skin, in affection, in sexual contact, in erotic play and power. Our skin is protective, but it is also porous and permeable. It gives us shape and texture. It has social and political implications. Entertainer Michael Jackson's life and death was determined by the fact that he was never at home in his skin, especially in terms of race and gender.

We talk about learning to be comfortable in our own skin; learning to love its color, texture, heat and coolness. Our skin breathes. In Chinese medicine, our skin is most connected, as an organ, to the lungs. Every cell in our body changes every seven years, including our skin. What might be the implications for organizations, then? Should our organizations shed some of their structures, shapes, change their charts,

leadership structure at least every seven years? Would that kind of organic review improve trust?

Change is natural, normal, in bodies and in organizations. Trust that is nurtured helps organizations manage change partly by maintaining healthy boundaries. When trust is intact, operating well as a relational dynamic, we are less aware of it than when it has been broken. We speak of being "burned," psychologically, socially, emotionally, when we are deeply hurt. When our skin is burned, we become vulnerable immunologically. When our trust is broken, it can be hard to re-establish trust, which is necessary to healthy functioning interpersonally and in organizations.

Some people are scarred in terms of trust, even for life, and any minority community that has to cope with oppression starts out with a compromised trust system that requires special healing and attention.

We can't live without skin, or without trust. No organization can flourish or grow without a healthy skin to protect the "bones" or structure. No organization can thrive without healthy trust throughout its system.

Trustworthy Leaders

For a church like MCC, we have to have leaders who are willing to engage around the "trust deficit" issues that challenge our churches and communities.

Jim Collins, author of *Good to Great,* says that what makes a good organization become great, first and foremost, is what he calls "Level 5 Leaders."[63] I translate this to mean what makes trustworthy leaders. To summarize, he says such leaders:

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[63] Collins, 39.

- Embody a paradoxical mix of personal humility and professional will
- Set up successors for even greater success in the next generation
- Display a compelling modesty
- Are fanatically driven, infected with an incurable need to produce sustained results, no matter how hard the decisions
- Are more plow horse than show horse
- Look out the window to attribute success to others; look in the mirror to take the blame for errors[64]

I take this to heart as I lead MCC these days. What would it mean for us if more of our pastors, lay leaders, and denominational leaders could embrace all or many of these characteristics?

In her book, *Finding Our Way: Leadership for Uncertain Times,* Margaret Wheatley has this prescription for what she calls "New Organizational Capabilities," that are necessary for trust:[65]

- Focus People on the Big Picture—keep people from "spiraling inward"—"sponsor processes to bring people together." This is also about having an "external focus," rather than institutional navel-gazing. It is focus on the mission, which engenders trust.
- Communicate honestly and quickly—"People deal far better with uncertainty and stress when they know what's going on, even if the information is incomplete." In an embattled, low-trust environment, this is crucial.
- Prepare for the Unknown. This we do not necessarily do well in MC, though, as we have become more flexible in our structure, we can be more nimble in our responses.

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[64] Ibid.
[65] Wheatley, 118-123.

- Keep meaning at the forefront—"meaning" is the most powerful motivator, communicate meaning! Managing a lot of change in our uncertain environment means communicating better, succinctly and about meaning, first of all.

Finally, I offer an analysis based on the "Four Frames" of reframing an organization[66] as a touchstone for understanding trust and MCC:

Structure: If organizational structure is really a process, not a static, fixed product, not about one way or one model, this means that we have to trust our people, our creativity, ourselves-in-relation as we align our organization with our purpose and a trustworthy, justice-based process. As we seek justice, wholeness and the realm of God, our structure based in trust and trustworthiness will emerge. While it is not helpful to see structure changes as the solution to every problem, I can testify to the difficulties of working in a structure that lacks clarity of roles and responsibilities. For years, I watched how difficult it was for us to make some critical decisions in MCC, because no one was quite sure who had the authority or responsibility to do so. Structure clarity is a gift that we gave to ourselves recently, along with simplicity and flexibility. The other observation is that leaders have to be trained in how to make a structure really work. This takes time and focus to achieve.

Human Resources: We must be the kind of church in which leaders respect followers, and trust can be tested. How we treat one another, trust one another, is a sign of our authenticity as a church of Jesus. Trusting our fellow workers, our churches, our pastors, lay leaders becomes more and more the way forward. How can we demonstrate that caring for each other is our first concern? This is an issue with counter-cultural, non-profits and

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[66] Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal. *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice and Leadership* (Jossey-Bass, Inc., Fourth Edition, 2008).

churches. We have rhetoric of justice, but sometimes we lack adequate human resources policies and practices. Or we are uncertain about what is just and appropriate in terms of salaries and benefits for leaders and workers. We do not focus enough attention on our theology or philosophy of budgeting and justice. We are always making up for past injustices, rather than setting and sticking to policies and practices that are realistic and fair. Many of our local church boards also need guidance on these issues.

Political: Trust must be based in sophisticated power analysis (which is missing in Covey and many others). This includes appreciating differences, and understanding life from the margins as well as the center. Our organization must reflect post-colonial analysis. Trust must have its eyes wide open as it becomes an ally of justice. Perhaps our biggest challenge in this arena is creating a global structure and system that will help churches from outside North America to thrive with just the right balance between autonomy and connection. If our resource engine is in North America, how can we let go and share MCC globally with limited resources, and without North American dominance? How can we invite emerging global leaders into conversation that will solicit their best, creative thinking, and encourage their leadership for our future? In the U.S. in particular, it will be lifting up the voices and inviting the leadership of young adults, of racial and ethnic minorities to really take their place in creating MCC's future.

Symbolic: Our church, our movement must be rooted in truth and truth-telling, in shared values, humility, in connecting Jesus and justice. MCC's practice of Open Communion, based in radical inclusivity, is clearly rooted in a sacramentality of trust. It feels like there is a lot of competency in that one area of liturgical life. There is a lot to be

explored in MCC's liturgical and theological diversity, in sharing our stories. I'm not sure we have ever really stopped to study our symbolic life, activities and reflected on them. This is a rich area for study and growth in MCC.

Conclusion:

Creating a trustworthy organization, especially a church from the margins, is a worthy vocation, and a great gift to any community. MCC's great gift to our communities and to the world is the model of a church institution that is committed to embodying trustworthy practices and behaviors. We do this, not only because it is the way to succeed, in the long run, but also out of a deep, spiritual conviction that to do so is to align ourselves with the trustworthy God who called us in the first placed. And for the sake of so many who will come after us, looking for hope in a place they can trust.

CHAPTER 3

QUEERING TRUST THEOLOGICALLY

In this chapter, I will offer selected theological resources and insights regarding trust. These will be viewed through the context of MCC's emerging theological development in order to "re-orient" a theological conversation about trust, and attempt to "queer it." I will thread, throughout, some reflections on the life and ministry of Charles Wesley, the 18th century preacher and movement leader, whose struggles with theology and trust are instructive. I will also focus on selected feminist, liberation and queer voices as we think theologically about leadership and trust.

Trust and mistrust in God and in community is at the heart of much of the Biblical narrative and its expressed values: broken trust characterizes the Adam and Eve stories; the call of Abraham, stories of the patriarchs, Moses and Exodus are about the re-establishment of, and experimentation with trust. The prophetic tradition can be framed as the effort of the prophets to call Israel back to faithfulness, i.e., trustworthiness; and to a renewed trust in a God who cares about justice.

The Psalms speak over and over again of the challenge and necessity to trust in God, in good times and in trying times, reminding the reader of the nature of God who is to be trusted, despite outward circumstances and appearances! In many ways, the Psalms are an excellent view into the paradox of trust and mistrust: doubt and fear and outrage

are often the opening lines of a Psalm, which moves towards letting go and affirmation of trust.[1]

Jesus' ministry in the margins called out the religious establishment for their hypocrisy and untrustworthiness as spiritual guides. Jesus trusts himself to those labeled as sinners and outcasts; he associates with women who offered him food, safe lodging, and resources; and with people of doubtful reputation, who became his disciples. The disciples and the early church, as the Body of Christ, had to trust the presence of a crucified and risen Lord, and a very unpredictable Holy Spirit. They had to trust one another, as they "held all things in common,"[2] and gave their lives to this marginalized community of healing, hope, justice and resurrection.

The history and evolving theology of the Christian Church can be viewed through the lens of trust broken and restored; of institutions and whole cultures that stray far from the preaching and vision of Jesus, of that realm of justice and peace, which must be continuously reformed and re-invented.

Queering Charles Wesley

In trying to come to a deeper understanding of the theology of trust and trustworthiness, I have focused on the theology and life of Charles Wesley, the younger brother of John Wesley, and the co-founder of the Methodist revival. Wesley lived and ministered at the powerful juncture of the Reformation and the Enlightenment. At the heart of his theology and hymnody, and at the heart of the movement he co-founded, was

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[1] For Christians, in particular, Psalm 22, which Jesus, in the gospel story, quotes from the cross, Mark 15:34.
[2] Acts 4:32 (NIV).

radical and trustworthy love of God. This love of God was deeply challenged by his conflicting institutional and personal loyalties as the Methodist movement grew. I have tried to "queer" his story, without any implications about his sexuality.

Charles Wesley was the most famous and prolific hymn writer in Christian history (he wrote about 9,000 hymns in all) and at least 400 of those hymns have endured and become ecumenical classics.[3] He is a complicated figure in terms of his role in the birth of a movement that crossed class lines and sensibilities in eighteenth century England; also because of painful conflicts with the direction of Methodism, and with his brother, John, concerning the intersections of theology, ecclesiology, trust and class.

These issues are also at the core of Metropolitan Community Church's self-understanding, three centuries later. Charles Wesley lived during the first forty years of Methodism, and I have served in leadership of MCC for thirty-six of its first forty two years. Many of the stories of early Methodist remind me of MCC's story.

Wesley turned the church of his day, its theology, its deeply rooted class orthodoxy, on its ear, and so doing "queered," or expanded the diversity of the church into this Methodist movement. He and his brother, and many others from the early days of the movement were threatened, beaten, persecuted and derided for their theology of radical inclusion, and their ministry to the under classes.

Let me offer Dr. Tom Bohache's definition of "queering:"

> I use the term 'queer' in an inclusive sense to refer to all who are disempowered in a heteronormative world, whether they self-identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, straight, questioning or none of

[3] John R. Tyson, *Assist Me to Proclaim: The Life and Hymns of Charles Wesley* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), viii.

> these...the word 'queer' empowers diversity because of its imprecise and hard-to-pin down meaning. Moreover, 'queer' has both an adjectival (descriptive) and verbal (active) sense....One who is 'queer' may be seen as transgressive, unorthodox, radical, in-your-face or against-the-grain, because in imperialist straight society, s/he navigates in intentional opposition to a seemingly fixed current....Thus to 'queer' a scripture is to render it unusual and non-normative, to shake it up and see how it might be reconfigured, or even, as the queer theologian and activist Robert Goss has maintained, to 'spoil what has already been spoiled' by generations of sexist, racist and homophobic biblical interpretation....A 'queer' hermeneutic...will not only 'queer' but it will query: it must be a...turning over of layers of heteropatriarchal tradition to reveal what lies beneath.[4]

This definition supports a paradox about trust that must be theologically unpacked: that healthy trust is created when we achieve a balance between risking trust and healthy mistrust, or questioning. In order for an individual or community to thrive, creating trusting relationships is necessary and healing: but we must retain the right to use a "hermeneutic of suspicion,"[5] when dealing with issues of power and privilege, in the community and beyond. That includes our relationships with God, faith, the Bible and church.

To refuse to trust is to live in the kind of paranoid, manipulative world where one never knows what is true or whom to trust, a very post-modern experience; and the subject of a lot of films and popular TV shows, such as "Damages."[6] On the other hand, to trust unwisely, without verification, is to be vulnerable to the Bernie Madoff's of the world, if one has money, or the forces of global capitalism if one does not.

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[4] Tom Bohache, "Matthew," *The Queer Bible Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 493.
[5] This concept is from Elizabeth Schussler-Fiorenza's powerful book, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroads, 1983).
[6] In this show starring Glenn Close as a gifted self-promoting lawyer, every episode brings twists and turns, and questions about who or what to trust. The answer is always nothing and no one.

Theology has a role in creating or undermining trust, especially in the church. What does it mean to trust God with that paradoxical view? What "lies beneath" our traditions and struggles around that core concept of a trusting relationship with the Divine and with other human beings?

Religion seems to function in two contradictory ways in society. On the one hand, religion is as a tool of oppression, the handmaiden of colonialism and capitalism; and a way of keeping and holding power and dividing people from each other. Religion is used as a justification for violence and war. On the other hand, it is an ardent promoter of progressive values of love, community, non-violence, peace and justice.

Healthy trusting, which empowers all parties, is counter-cultural in the early part of the 21st century. Political careers, financial fortunes, media empires are built on fear and mistrust. Trusting runs counter to the forces that profit from fear, polarization and division, and counter to those forces in the church that would want to retain control through fear. What if our ecclesiology or theology of the beloved community were built on the kind of trust that Mohammed Yunnus claims can revolutionize banking into a post-colonial project? How could religious institutions serve the people justly, especially those who are most vulnerable and who have suffered the most?

Often, theology is discussed in categories, such as "God" (as in God the Father), "Christology," "the Holy Spirit," "the Church;" "Human Nature" and other topics, in that order. I am choosing to begin from "below" or from within. For those who have experienced systematic oppression, who are not the dominant group in some important way, we must start backwards, shaking it up, queering it from below.

Valuing Trust Within the Self-in-Relation

We have to start, theologically, not with God, but with trusting the self-in-relation. The questioning of the category of an isolated "self" has been crucial to feminist psychotherapy and theology for decades.[7] When I speak of the "self," it is always through this understanding that the goal is not self-sufficiency or total independence, but with the understanding that the healthy person is one who is always seeking deeper connections.[8] In religious terms, it is what Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh explains as living a life of "inter-being."[9]

I am one of those 21st century Christians who thinks anything with "inter-" as a prefix has to be better! The religious challenge of this century for religious people will be to live religiously as inter-religious persons.[10] It means to live as a Christian in awareness, respect and appreciation of the gifts and wisdom of other faiths. Whether it is "inter-being," "inter-religious," or "inter-sectionality," it is a good thing. Just as the self is only really self-in-relation, so it is that all of our identities and theologies are shaped and improved in relation to others.

What Reggie McNeal calls "self awareness,"[11] means re-learning to trust myself in relationship to others and to "the powers that be" in the world. The damage that was

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[7] Judith V. Jordan, *Relational-Cultural Therapy* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2010), 2-3.
[8] Ibid., 1.
[9] Thich Nhat Hanh is the author of many inter-religiously friendly books that expound on the Buddhist concept of "inter-being" such as *The Miracle of Mindfulness* (Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 1987); and *Peace is Every Step* (Bantam Books, 1992).
[10] Peter C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Press, 2004).
[11] Reggie McNeal, *Practicing Greatness: Seven Disciplines of Extraordinary Spiritual Leaders* (Jossey-Bass: 2006), 9-34.

done to many of us was damage to the sense of the image of God within us, within ourselves. However, we can't have God back until we have ourselves-in-relation back. This is where we must begin in order to queer a theology of trust.

Learning or re-learning to trust the voice within is a key to becoming trustworthy as a human being, a leader, a person of faith.[12] I was 11 years old when I first heard and trusted that Voice that I heard within me that was more-than-me. That existential moment meant having a Voice beyond me hear my own voice, respond, and assure me that I could trust my own emerging self-in-relation. It was the road I took to trusting my body, beginning to embrace my sexuality and truth.

Homophobia and transphobia in particular, teach us not to trust our bodies, our desires, our flesh. From the time we are very young, many of us were filled with shame, guilt or confusion about what we felt, desired, and loved. Some of us could hide those feelings, and others could not. Either way, we paid a terrible price, which distorted reality for us, and often caused us to mistrust ourselves. Our relationships to our bodies themselves were suspect, distorted and disconnected.[13]

To be authentic and whole, Parker Palmer reminds us that we need to nurture our "true self,"[14] which is what helps us thrive in what can be an untrustworthy world. To be alienated from one's deepest self is to be alienated from God, which is the primary way,

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[12] Carol Gilligan, *In A Different Voice* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1982) pioneered new understandings of women and psychology. Carol chose not to use the term "self," but rather "voice" to make it clear that 'self" is a construct that contributes to a view of human consciousness that assumes one can be a person but not be in relationship.

[13] Jordan, *5.*

[14] Parker Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward An Undivided Life* (Jossey-Bass: 2004), 34-39.

besides physical abuse, in which LGBT people have been colonized, controlled and damaged.

Charles Wesley and Self-in-Relation

Charles Wesley's preaching and hymns were pre-occupied with the grace and love of God. God's universal love is trustworthy, above all else. In order to get to this place, theologically, which was radical in his day (and in our day, too), *Wesley had to trust himself and his experience.* He had to wrestle with trusting a new community of faith led by a brother he adored and with whom he had of issues of trust. He had to wrestle with his own vision of leadership in an emerging religious community.

Charles Wesley was self-effacing, even shy.[15] He struggled from early on with mental and spiritual depression.[16] Yet he learned to trust the prophetic Voice of God within him that sang hymns in his heart as well. Speaking about "self" in the 18th century is complex. The concept of self that we have in the 20th and 21st centuries is so much more developed, in a psychological and cultural sense, not to say that it is a good or bad thing. Martin Groves comments on this dilemma:

> Thus far it has been loosely argued that there is a correspondence between the importance of the individual self or self-conscious soul in Charles Wesley's spirituality and his place in the English ascetic tradition. The other side of the coin...is that Charles is representative of a mystical, spiritual tradition which has at its heart the apophatic and kenotic position that the self is saved only when entirely lost in the unsayable love of God."[17]

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[15] Cyril Moxley, *Apostles of Love* (Oxford: Amante Press, 1992), 14.
[16] Ibid., 17.
[17] Martin Groves, "Charles Wesley's Spirituality," in *Charles Wesley: Life, Literature and Legacy,* eds. Kenneth G.C. Newport and Ted A. Campbell (Peterborough, UK: Epworth, 2007), 452.

A third position could be that Charles Wesley's assertion of self, and the worth of a single individual to God, are consistent with the emerging Enlightenment view of human dignity and life, and the "rights of man," precursor to what we think of today as "human rights," another connection to MCC as the "Human Rights Church." There is in Wesley's poetry and preaching valorization of every life to God, along with a self-effacing desire to lose himself in union with God: "lost in wonder, love and praise."[18]

Growing up as a United Methodist, I learned "the Wesley Quadrilateral" as a tool for understanding the sources of authority for faith as a Christian. These were: the scriptures, church tradition, science (human knowledge) and personal experience, influenced by the Holy Spirit. I would like to "queer the Quadrilateral" in applying it to MCC's emergence.

The "experience" category is the one that validates personal experiences of revelation (through which Methodism was founded), and the "self-in-relation." Any one side of the Quadrilateral can critique or help interpret the others. It is a model that tries to balance these four sources of authority.

In Rev. Troy Perry's world, and most of ours in 1968, all the sides of the Quadrilateral were lined up against him and us—except for one: personal experience. Before that moment of revelation, Troy attempted suicide. Murdering of the isolated self becomes the solution when it seems like something is so deeply wrong that cannot be cured or changed. In object relations theory, the reason children (and maybe adults too)

[18] "Love Divine All Loves Excelling," from *The New Century Hymnal* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press), 43.

attempt suicide is because they believe, rightly or wrongly, that someone, especially someone in authority, wants them dead.[19]

In 1968, at some level, most LGBT people could imagine that someone they admired would want them to be dead rather than "gay." The revelation that Troy Perry experienced was for him, as it was for me, *salvation.* It was what the Quakers called "the Inner Light," what John Wesley called the "heart strangely warmed;" and what the Pentecostals shouted about being "filled with the Holy Ghost." It was about the self-in-relation in relationship to a queer God that was able to turn the powers of this world, even the church, upside down, "through the foolishness of those who would believe."[20]

Troy Perry had a direct experience of God that contradicted everything he knew about being gay—that one was psychologically sick, that being gay was against the law, the church said it was evil and the Bible condemned it. His first sermon was not "God Loves Us," or, "The Bible Says We are OK;" or, "The Whole Church is Wrong;" it was, "Be True to You." It was about the recovery of trust in himself, that self-in-relation that was a gift of God, that nothing could take away.

In the beginning, then, was the "self-in-relation" in relationship to truth. Queer theologian Grace Jantzen, says that the Book of Genesis is:

> the strongest possible mythological representation of difference, multiplicity, variety. All the infinite variety of plants and trees and insects, birds and animals are represented as designed by God and declared good. It is at the farthest possible remove from a doctrine

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[19] My source for this is a conversation, years ago, with my partner, Paula Schoenwether, who did her Ph.D. in psychology on object relations theory applied to lesbians.

[20] 1 Corinthians 1:26-29 (NIV). I cannot count how often I have preached on this passage, and how much it describes our experience in MCC.

> valorizing uniformity: it presents diversity as a manifestation of the divine.[21]

So why not "see" or "imagine" gender and sexual diversity beyond the binary categories? Why not, then, be true to ourselves, as the first theological task?

Troy's Pentecostal experiences set him up, in a positive sense, for this breakthrough. Pentecostals, though mostly fundamental today, have a deep reverence for the Holy Spirit, which cannot be controlled. Troy learned to hear the Voice first, in that context. Historians and researchers speculate about the Azusa Street Revival of the early 20th century: a multi-racial, barrier breaking movement that swept poor people off their feet, saw women empowered as leaders, and was led by gays as well.[22]

To begin to trust the self-in-relation also means daring to mis-trust the false self, the imposed views of ourselves, our identity, that we have swallowed to our detriment. It means being willing to be suspicious about everything one ever learned about God, Jesus, the Bible, what it means to be good, holy, or whole.

Dr. Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, one of the earliest writers on the Bible and homosexuality and feminist scholar, writes about the experience of growing up fundamentalist, and the damage to the ability to trust oneself-in-relation:

> Christians, especially, will be encouraged to learn the difference between egocentricity and healthy self-love and self-care. For instance, one transman described the connection between his fundamentalist training and his initial repression of his trans-self. I could echo his words out of my own early experience of the evangelical right wing:

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[21] Grace Jantzen, "Contours of a Queer Theology," *Literature and Theology*, Vol. 15, No. 3, September 2001, 278.

[22] From conversations with Pentecostal leader, Bishop Yvette Flunder, who has researched Pentecostal founder Charles Parham and the complex and racialized sexuality of the early Pentecostal movement.

> "'Fundamentalist' religion does not help you to develop your own sense of who you are. It's all about Jesus and forgetting yourself—you're regularly taught certain verses in the Bible along the lines of "Don't trust yourself: you're too sick and sinful to trust your own thoughts."[23]

More than fifteen years ago, after many years of preaching in MCC, I wrote a book that dared to "queer" the Bible, beyond just responding defensively to the "clobber passages."[24] I was inspired, in part, by my friend John Boswell, openly gay Yale historian[25] whose final book, *Same-Sex Unions in Pre-Modern Europe,* caused a huge ruckus. In this ground breaking work about church-sanctified gay unions a millennium earlier, based on translations of documents in the Vatican Library, he challenges the idea that gay unions are something modern or never-before sanctioned in the church.

John told me that he began this work with an intuitive leap—he believed these rites and ceremonies existed, and that if he persevered, he could find them. There is a fine line, of course, between this kind of trust of one's intuition, and simply seeing what you want to see. John was meticulous in his research, and struggled to be true to his academic values and his passionate faith in an LGBT pre-modern history in the church.

He told me before he died that it was as if these previously un-translated documents at the Vatican Library had "called" to him. Today, those recovered rites are

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[23] Virginia Mollenkott, "Transforming Feminist Christianity," *New Feminist Christianity*, eds. Hunt and Neu, (Woodstock, Vermont: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2010), 134.

[24] Nancy L. Wilson *Our Tribe: Queer Folk, God, Jesus, and the Bible,* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995). The "clobber passages" are the six passages typically used by more conservative Christians to proof-text a negative view of the Bible and homosexuality, which we also call "texts of terror:" Genesis 19, the story of Sodom and Gomorrah; Leviticus 18:22 and 19:20; Romans 1:26 and 27; 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10 (NIV).

[25] John Boswell was the author of *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (University of Chicago Press, 1980). John died of AIDS shortly after *Same-Sex Unions in Pre-Modern Europe* (Villard Books, 1994), was published.

used all over the world in LGBT wedding ceremonies, resonating as they do with our current struggle for marriage equality. John was brutally attacked by Roman Catholic scholars and institutions (he was a Roman Catholic), in ways that were surprising to him, and difficult in his last days. His connection to church history, to our nascent movement, motivated him to pay the price for his work. As Troy had preached, John was true to himself in relation to his community and faith.

From Valuing Self-in-Relation to Valuing Others: Trust and Friendship

Often, before there is community, there is the miracle of forming trustworthy friendships with at least one other person. Particularly the queer community, the idea of coming out to one other person, the first person with whom one is truly oneself, becomes a new place to stand, to gain confidence in that trust in oneself. How does one know that one's private revelation, one's emerging trust in one's self-in-relation is not just a delusion? That knowledge begins with breaking the isolation, often, in the first, tentative one-on-one experiences.

Charles Wesley and Friendships

Charles Wesley was someone who cherished and nurtured many friendships, primarily with men (friendships with women not in one's family were unusual). A friend and early biographer said he was "a man made for friendship."[26] He wrote fifty-five "Hymns for Christian Friends," and hymns and poems devoted to marriage and

[26] Tyson, 117.

relationships.[27] Christian friendship was part and parcel of this new movement, it was the air Wesley breathed, and it was the "muse" of his art.

Charles' passionate friendships with men were intense and even stormy. His most important friendship was with his brother John. John was clearly the leader and organizer of the movement, but Charles, who married first, acted like an older brother to John in terms of his personal and love life. Tyson writes, "The ongoing distrust, not to mention the occasional animosity and open warfare, that existed between Molly Wesley (wife of John) and Charles Wesley had deep and lasting effects on the brothers' relationship for almost two decades."[28]

Charles' capacity for friendship drew him into ministry. One of the most profound accounts is of Charles' early experience in reaching out, in friendship, to men on death row. Franklin Wilder, citing early Methodist accounts, tells the story of Charles Wesley visiting Newgate Prison.[29] Young Wesley visited the prison, and gained the trust of ten men who were condemned to death. He returned day after day, offering comfort and assurance of God's grace in Jesus Christ, available to all. Wesley assured them that only one thing was needed, faith in God's love. One prisoner finally cried out, "Even me? God loves even me?" When I think of the marginalization of LGBT people, and the criminalization of our affections and relationships, which is still the reality in many places in the world, I hear this cry not as something quaint, but as contemporary.

Wesley accompanied them on the day of their execution. As Wilder tells it:

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[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid., 183.
[29] Frank Wilder, *The Methodist Riots: The Testing of Charles Wesley* (Great Neck, New York: Todd & Honeywell, 1981), 8.

> In those days, hanging was a favorite public sport, more popular than cock fighting. People expected to hear the prisoners cry and curse, not one was forthcoming this time. The crowd yelled their disappointment. The men did not pay any attention. They had eyes and ears for only Charles. At the last, Charles broke into a song they had sung before. All the prisoners joined him: 'Father of Jesus Christ, My Lord, My Savior and My Head I trust in Thee, whose powerful word hath raised Him from the dead.' Then Charles kissed each one, and got off the cart, said Wesley, 'I...returned home full of peace and confidence in my friends' happiness. That hour under the gallows was the most blessed hour of my life.'[30]

After the hanging, Charles Wesley preached from the cart to the crowd, shaming them, and lifting up the value of each life to God.[31] Wesley was experimenting with a kind of "spiritual activism" that sought out the most vulnerable.[32]

In 1968, when Troy Perry had only one side of the Quadrilateral that he could lean on, the Voice he heard through the self-in-relation, he began pushing back and questioning the other sources (the Bible, tradition and science). Today they are all lining up with his personal experience. He sought confirmation by initiating conversation with friends: "Is anyone else out there?" he asked.

Our MCC founding narrative is not about men in prison, but a young gay man, a friend, in a gay bar.[33] When the bar was raided by police one night, the young man turned to Troy as he was being arrested and said, "See, God can't possibly love us when we have to go through this!" This was the moment when Troy's private revelation became a public matter.

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[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Grove, 447.
[33] Dudley Clendinen and Adam Nagourney, *Out For Good: The Struggle to Build a Gay Rights Movement in America* (NewYork: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 180.

Troy Perry's friendship with Willie Smith, a young, former Seventh Day Adventist also pushed him out of his isolation into action. They talked endlessly about God and religion. This conversation sharpened and shaped Troy's own emerging theology, in advance of that first, public MCC service. As Troy came out of isolation with his emerging dream, he began to trust it more.

In thinking about friendships, I was very intrigued with the concept, developed by Jean Baker Miller, of "condemned isolation:"[34]

> In condemned isolation we feel immobilized, unworthy and alone, and we feel that we have created this reality. The individual feels that she or he is to blame for her or his powerlessness and hopelessness and there is something intrinsically 'wrong' with her or him....She or he will not risk the vulnerability necessary to make connections....Miller and Silver (1997) coined the term 'central relational paradox' to capture what happens in this situation.[35]

The central relational paradox," is what takes place for many girls. Bill Kondrath describes it this way:

> ...girls begin to sacrifice their needs and desires *in order to be in connection*, in a culturally acceptable way with others who have more power that they have...and thus they 'keep (their) true feelings out of relationship to maintain some semblance or remnant of relationship.'...Sacrificing one's true voice for the appearance of relationship where you have to act less-than, results in a plummeting of self-worth. "[36]

This is an incredibly accurate description of so many LGBT people before they come out or began to form life-saving friendships. How many of us, male,

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[34] Jordan, 28.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Kondrath, *God's Tapestry: Understanding and Celebrating Differences* (Herdon, Virginia: The Alban Institute, 2008), 160.

female, or transgender, had to hide our true thoughts and feelings in order to be able to stay living with our families, to survive?

This concept also extends to groups, or communities, not only individuals. One of the contributing factors to condemned isolation is shame, feeling that one's "very being" is unworthy.[37] Jordan notes that,

> Shaming is a powerful way to silence and isolate individuals, but it also plays a large role in silencing and disempowering marginalized groups whose members are strategically, if often invisibly, shamed in order to reinforce their isolation and thus their subordination: 'Isolation is the glue that holds oppression in place.' (Laing, 1998, presentation)[38]

For queer people, this isolation and relational paradox were most often broken first by friendships that were formed, across class, race, gender and religious lines, which provided support to all who would take the next steps in liberation.

Theologically, it seems that Jesus' model of discipleship was that "discipleship of equals,"[39] which the Gospel of John names as "friendship."[40] It is a powerful, egalitarian and queer-friendly model for sure. Jesus embraced a circle of friends on the margins who became a liberative community. And I am reminded of the way in which, decades ago queer folk, when referring to one's lover/partner/spouse, to both protect and to offer an underground "clue," said "this is my 'Friend'" with the proper emphasis! We hoped that those who had ears to hear would hear. For thousands of years, queer people, who felt

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[37] Jordan, 29.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Elisabeth Schussler-Fiorenza, *A Discipleship of Equals: A Critical Feminist Ekklesia-logy of Liberation* (New York: Crossroads, 1993).
[40] John 15: 12-15 (NIV).

alien in their families, churches and culture, sought refuge in just, redemptive, erotic friendships that eventually made it possible to change the world.

From Valuing Self-in-Relation to Valuing Community and Church: Trust in Emerging Institutions

It is a big leap to move from trusting one's self-in-relation, one's intimates, to trusting a community or church. So much of the oppression queer people experience comes from cultural, political and church structures, which set the rules that determine who was a criminal, who was moral or immoral, whose relationships were worthy of sanctification.

And it is one thing to get a few friends to agree with you, to validate your beliefs or dreams. It is another thing to participate in the creation of "above ground" community, with institutions, and a culture all its own; and to challenge billions of Christians, and powerful church leaders to change their fundamental beliefs about you and your community. In order for massive social change to occur, community had to be birthed as strangers banded together in a new kind of broader model of friendship. As hundreds, then thousands, then tens of thousands, and more came out in those early years of both MCC and gay liberation, a community came into being.

Charles Wesley, Community and Church

John Tyson describes the early 18th century into which Charles Wesley was born as "a prosperous time for some;"[41] but, really a time when "half the nation's population

[41] Tyson, 3.

was becoming increasingly poorer in the midst of this period of economic expansion."[42] This is so contemporary! How true this is of the U. S. in the last nearly forty years, as the rich have gotten richer, and the poor, poorer.

Charles Wesley started out ministering to people whom he and John referred to as the "working poor."[43] John Wesley wrote, "I found some in their cells, others in their garrets, half-starved with cold and hunger added to weakness and pain. But I found none of them unemployed who was able to crawl about the room. So wickedly, so devilishly false, is that common objection: 'they are poor because they are idle.'"[44] It is painful to hear this same criticism of the poor in Wesley's time that we hear today.

Charles Wesley grew up in a huge family, with both Anglican and Puritan roots, for whom "the day to day struggle against grinding poverty was one of the constant realities of life."[45] In those days, it was poor people, in wretched circumstances, who were seen as beyond the reach of God's saving grace, their worldly status being the sign of that fact. It is this belief that Charles and John Wesley literally campaigned against, and because of which, eventually "Methodism grew faster in the nineteenth century than any other Christian religion on Earth."[46]

This caused an ecclesiological dilemma that both Wesley's wrestled with for decades. When the "church" rejects the needs of the people, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, where is the church? When does a movement become "the gathered church?"

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[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid., 4.
[45] Ibid., 5.
[46] Wilder, 3.

Who is it that can break the Body of the marginalized Jesus, or bless the Cup of his life that was lived in solidarity with "the least of these?" [47] The Wesley's created a movement that, as it grew, demanded more structure, and was held back by not being able to ordain ministers or serve the sacraments.

In some ways, it is easier to trust ourselves and those close to us, than trust institutions. In our post-modern world, institutions are automatically suspect. Even though institutions, including the church, were created by selves-in-relation, the mistrust of corporations, institutions, and these larger endeavors is at an all time high. It is the reason people say, "I'm spiritual, but not religious." Somehow, being "spiritual" seems more like an individual or small group activity, less apt to be the locus of mischief or abuse. "Religion," on the other hand, seems rife with abuse, moribund rules and tortured logic.

How counterintuitive it is, then, that as LGBT people came out of the closet in large numbers, we began creating institutions, social service centers, civil rights organizations, chambers of commerce, hotlines, schools and scholarly organizations, cultural organizations, social clubs, sporting organizations, bowling leagues, banks, and, yes, churches and synagogues? As a part of recovering trust, queer people had to experiment with creating institutions they could trust, even as they often, simultaneously, mistrusted what they created! I think of the Wesleys creating Methodist societies, which fostered orphanages, schools, burial societies and other institutions, and then struggling to trust what they created.

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[47] Matthew 25: 40 (NIV).

There is a spectrum of religion and respectability in the queer faith communities: MCC is at one end of that spectrum, churches or religious organizations that grew from the ground up, forming churches and institutions now, by and for LGBT folks and our allies. At the very same time, efforts began to transform the mainstream church. Sometimes, MCCers resented those who preferred to push the mainstream church, seeing ourselves as the prophetic, righteous choice, not compromised by the slow-to-change pace of most institutions. Some from the mainstream churches saw MCC as not "real," as a temporary accommodation, that should disappear if acceptance came in many churches. This was also a division along class lines—the churches that tended to identify more as middle or upper class changed more quickly than denominations that serve the working class or poor.

Today, it is possible for there to be more fluidity—MCCers can leave to join the United Church of Christ, or the Lutherans. Methodists and others can more easily transfer into MCC. MCC has a growing relationship with The Fellowship, an African American Pentecostal same-gender loving movement of churches, including recognizing each other's ministers.

But all of us, MCC, The Fellowship, all the Open and Affirming Church movements, of every denomination, face the challenges of the suspicion about Christians and Christianity. All our churches deal with people who have been so hurt, disappointed, and betrayed by church, that their connection to our churches is fragile and fraught with lots of conflicting emotions.

One of the ways to try to understand that conflict is to try to understand the crisis today in the Roman Catholic Church, and to hear some of the queer analysis of that crisis.

Dr. Mary Hunt, a feminist Catholic scholar, and a lesbian, is one of my guides in this area. She perseveres in her Catholic identity, while being a fierce critic of the Roman Catholic Church. She observes, "'Church' as the building on the corner where Father presides and people go on Sunday to fill up their sacramental tanks is gradually being replaced by house churches, small communities and other settings where people think, pray, and celebrate as agenda of their own spirituality."[48] This is the "church" that people will trust, she claims.

As I have been trying to understand the nature and implications of the sexual abuse scandals in the Roman Catholic Church, in relationship to a theology of trust, I discovered that the scandal in Ireland has been particularly severe and intense. In my mind, the betrayal, rage and helplessness that the people of Ireland feel about the abuse is not unlike the rage queer people feel towards the church. For Irish Catholics, the dam recently burst:

> The Irish responded to the publication in 2009 of two lengthy, damning reports detailing thousands of cases of rape, sexual molestation and lurid beatings, spanning Ireland's entire history as an independent country; and the efforts of church officials to protect the abusers rather than the victim—with anger, disgust, vocal assaults on priests in public and demands that the government and society disentangle themselves from the church.[49]

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[48] Mary Hunt, "New Feminist Catholics," from *New Feminist Christianity* (Woodstock, Vermont: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2010), 271.
[49] Russell Shorto, "The Irish Affliction," *The New York Times Magazine*, February 13, 2011, 44.

Today, people in Ireland are starting to resist. "If you go around saying you're an ardent Catholic, people will be distrusting of you."[50] More of them will identify as "spiritual, but not religious," I am sure. This distrust, is healthy distrust, of course, the kind that signals a powerful hermeneutic of suspicion in response to the abuse and cover-up. It is the kind of distrust that is necessary in order to regain trust of oneself, one's community and even one's church.

What made Ireland so vulnerable? One only has to look at their colonial history, the story of oppression and suffering, and add to it the role of the Roman Catholic Church, Abbot Hederman, of Glenstal Abbey explains:

> Ireland was meant to be the purest country that ever existed, upholding the Catholic ideal of no sex except in marriage and then only for procreation. And the priest was to be the purest of the pure. It's not difficult to understand how the whole system became riddled with what we now call a scandal **but in fact was a complete culture**, because you had people with no understanding of their sexuality; of what sexuality even was, and they were in complete power.[51]

These are astonishing words, really, not a scandal, but a complete culture steeped in the worst kind of abuse. Mary Hunt elaborates:

> The implosion of the Roman Catholic hierarchy over the epidemic of priest pedophilia and episcopal cover-ups means that Catholic women face new challenges....It is clear that some of those who oppose women's full rights as members of the Catholic community...have engaged in criminal behavior or have covered up the criminal behavior of others....The entire ministerial and ecclesial structure of Roman Catholicism is exclusively male, rigidly hierarchical, stuffed with secrecy and deception and rewarding of duplicity.[52]

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[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid., 45.
[52] Hunt, 269-270.

This institutional violence of the Roman Catholic Church, towards women, children, and LGBT people that emanates from a sick, patriarchal structure, is an extreme example, but the violence happens across the board in churches. It has become obvious that American evangelicals, frustrated with losing the battle over LGBT civil rights in the US, have exported religiously based homophobic hatred to countries like Uganda,[53] culminating recently in the death of gay activist David Kato and the proposing of draconian legislation that would criminalize sexual minorities, including the death penalty.

Mainstream Protestant churches are not guiltless. Recently, I was sitting with a colleague from a mainstream church that had recently opened its doors more definitely to LGBT people, and while she was glad, she was still seething with memories of the decades of struggle, pain and damage. And, from the church, there is no acknowledgement, no apology, no sense of the new openness coming with some gesture of repentance, or recognition that any suffering occurred.

So much could be said, too, of the process through which African Americans created their own institutions, and churches, to heal and lift the community out of the immense suffering and oppression caused by slavery and its aftermath. I am always moved by both the resiliency and fragility of that early civil rights movement, born in the basement of churches.

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[53] Jeff Sharlet, "Straight Man's Burden: The American Roots of Uganda's Anti-Gay Persecutions, *Harper's Magazine,* September 2010.

From Valuing Self-in-Relation to Valuing Texts and Authorities: Trust as a Balancing

Where is our hope for the church? Decades ago, Dr. Letty Russell prophetically proposed a "Church in the Round," a different vision of that open community of faith. Friends and colleagues recall her shalom meals to which she would invite students and colleagues, this way:

> As Letty always reminds her students in the midst of the party, what they are experiencing is just a brief glimpse of God's gift of shalom to all creation. The joyous meal offers a preview…of God's future…because here people gather at a round table where no one is excluded, where power is shared, where multiple gifts are celebrated and where those who have been historically marginalized are welcomed to the seats of honor...(and) when the marginal are invited to the table, the vision of the eschaton the bring is often different from the consumerist eschatology the dominant culture generates.[54]

This is the vision of community and church that will create and restore trust.

Queer people of faith have had to apply a hermeneutic of suspicion to every human authority in order to be whole, to have justice. And we have had to learn to trust new authorities which we also hold accountable.

People on the margins wrestle with accepting anything as authoritative, including our own experience. Any authority we accept must be accountable and responsible in clear ways. Sometimes oppression causes a negative reaction to all authority. I have heard the expression, "hurt people hurt people," and we see behaviors in MCC churches that are astonishing, and would probably not happen elsewhere. There are people in MCC, or on the margins, who take pleasure in the failure of their leaders or

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[54] Serene Jones and Margaret A. Farley, *Liberating Eschatology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), *viii.*

organizations, who tear people down and assume the worst as a matter of course. Rejection and resistance to even lightly-worn authority with lots of accountability structures seems to be our legacy.

In 1968, homosexuality was illegal, which meant the sexual behaviors themselves were outlawed, and homosexuals were considered a criminal class, who were, for instance, not permitted to assemble. The full weight of the law, mostly deriving from English law, undergirded the criminal status. Organized crime and vice squads preyed upon a frightened community. And, homosexuality was considered a mental illness. In the late 1960's and early 1970's, fortunately, feminists and others were calling into question the politics of mental illness as a tool of oppression and conformity. The medical establishment had used its authority to colonize homosexuals through the pathology label. As these structures and diagnoses started to crumble, LGBT people tried to heal from the systemic abuse, and the fear of the medical establishment that often prevented us from seeking treatment at all.[55] Today, rogue doctors and psychiatrists still engage in this kind of malpractice, especially in religious settings, under the guise of "religious counseling" or "reparative therapy," in "ex-gay" settings.

This last of the unholy trinity of authorities lined up against us, and perhaps the most important one, was religion. Homosexuality was illegal, and pathological, because, at the core it was thought to be immoral according to the teachings of the Church, most of all, and other religious systems as well.

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[55] As pastor of MCC Los Angeles, I often taught at chaplaincy training programs in hospitals, helping people to understand how LGBT feel when hospitalized: their fears of being mistreated by medical staff, and their particular fear of chaplains. We would talk about the ways in which they could communicate their openness to the fact that not every patient is heterosexual.

This matrix of authorities was mutually reinforcing, of course. But, for the Protestants, both fundamentalist and not, it was the Bible that seemed to be the source of authority that most mattered. Wyndy Corbin Reuschling, wrestles with this question in relationship to how the Bible is used in evangelical ethics:

> The Bible is not something to be mastered and manipulated to give us the right answers to every question, nor ought it be reduced to an instrumental guide for decision making. For all of the emphasis evangelicals place on the authority of the Bible, this view actually reduces and diminishes the Bible's importance as a source for our moral lives. The Bible is scripture—our sacred text that we look to for understanding who we are and who we ought to be .... Stanley Hauerwas locates the moral authority of the Bible as scripture in its capacity to help us remember, reinterpret, and relive the story of Jesus in our communal lives: The moral use of scripture, therefore, lies precisely in its power to help us remember the stories of God for the continued guidance of our community and individual lives.[56]

The first book ever written in the English language on the topic of homosexuality was Derrick Sherwin Bailey's *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition,* in 1955.[57] It was used to support legalization of homosexuality in the U.K. in 1957.[58] This remarkable book was the only book or even scholarly article on homosexuality and the Bible until the publication of Troy Perry's *The Lord is My Shepherd and He Knows I'm Gay*[59] and a few other titles. Today, courses on queer studies in history, sociology, theology and Biblical interpretation are being taught in more and more schools and seminaries. Newer translations of the Bible include footnotes and annotations that

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[56] Wyndy Corin Reuschling, *Trust and Obey,* 65.
[57] Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (London, 1955).
[58] Mel White, "You Saved My Life," in *Sex As God Intended* (Maple Shade, NJ: Lethe Press, 2008), 231.
[59] Troy D. Perry, *The Lord is My Shepherd and He Knows I'm Gay* (Los Angeles: Universal Fellowship Press, 1972).

question traditional interpretations of the "texts of terror." People who took on the texts and authorities with courage and imagination, chose to trust themselves with the texts and vice-versa, embodying Russell's vision that "the Bible is therefore not only a text of terror, but also a text of emancipatory hope."[60]

This kind of scholarly re-consideration and re-interpretation regarding homosexuality and gender identity is happening in all branches of Judaism and in Islamic circles as well. It is one of the most important stories of Biblical interpretation that spans two centuries, though word of it has not filtered to most pews.

It is amazing that queer people have not abandoned holy texts, or faith, or the church or religion. Instead, many of us insisted on a conversation with all the sources of authority. One of my favorite, newer efforts is the one dealing with Reformed traditions and homosexuality that takes on the Heidelberg Catechism and the Westminster Larger Catechism![61] The Scriptures and all sacred texts have to be demystified and dethroned before they can be embraced and appreciated.

It is not only the Bible, but the structure of power in churches that causes mis-trust. Dr. Carter Heyward claims that "authoritarian power relations are the root of evil,"[62] rather than the "love of money," although they are inextricably connected. M. Scott Peck's theory is that lies and lying are the root of evil.[63] There is a connection there, too, that people use lies and lying to hold on to illegitimate and abusive power.

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[60] Jones, et al., *ix.*
[61] Jack Rogers, *Jesus, the Bible and Homosexuality: Explode the Myths, Heal the Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 117-127.
[62] Carter Heyward: "The Passion of Jesus: Beyond Moralism" from *Saving Jesus from Those Who are Right* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 120.
[63] M. Scott Peck, *People of the Lie* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983).

In our queer community, those in any kind of authority position must wear their authority lightly. People have been bullied into being told who they are, and what to do with a lot of terrible results. Leadership must really arise from within the community, be tested and re-tested, and should understand that it leads, or governs, only by the consent of the governed.

One of the recurring themes of the gospels is that Jesus' authority was "not like that of the scribes or Pharisees."[64] Jesus' authority came from within, from himself-in-relation to people hungry and thirsty for good news, for wisdom, for justice and hope. He was an itinerant rabbi with no position, no power in the religious hierarchy.

MCC laity used to have a button they wore that said, "Jesus was a layperson." I have struggled with this all my life. I accept that I have the spiritual gift of "pastor," and was ordained to that pastoral ministry. But I have always squirmed with discomfort in the knowledge that in MCC, the only way to be a leader has been to be a clergy person, and that clergy are a privileged class in MCC (the exception is our new Governing Board, which today is half clergy and half laity, a profound shift). People in MCC tend to come from strong clerical backgrounds, which, though they might critique, they also long for in MCC.

We all see the benefits of professionally trained clergy, who lead congregations or other ministries, and that has helped us grow. On the other hand, if we had invested the same amount of money and effort in training lay leaders, at every level, that we have spent in creating a clergy class, what might the results have been? Have we stifled

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[64] Mark 1: 22 (NIV).

MCC's growth with clericalism? Are we so attached to it now that it would be hard to let go of it?

For those from a Catholic background, the authority issue concerns the legitimacy of sacraments, of worship, of the teaching authority of the church. Catholics, who attend MCC, even if they no longer go to mass, may have difficulty fully participating. Maybe they attend, but do not receive communion, but never formally join the church. The Catholic teaching they grew up with said there is no other real church, which makes MCC unreal to them. How can it be a real church if LGBT people are in charge, if women are priests? This may include people who are enraged at the Catholic Church, who were molested by a priest, but cannot let go of the security that even a punitive, fear-based system provides.

Charles Wesley and Authority Issues

Methodism was socially and spiritually subversive of the classism that limited the Anglican Church of Wesley's day. It was a force that empowered lay people, dangerous to a clerically privileged system. Early Methodism was characterized by its non-judgmental character.[65] They established orphanages and schools,[66] fed needy families, employed people: "Here thieves, prostitutes, fools, people of every class—several men of distinction, a few of the learned merchants, and numbers of poor people who had never entered a place of worship, assembled in crowds and became godly."[67] No one thought "these people" could be godly, or good, or trustworthy themselves. They were attacked

[65] Wilder, 14.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid., 27.

at funerals,[68] beaten and stoned on the way to their services, while conducting services;[69] and their meeting houses burned down.[70] All of this was done by people who saw the Wesleys as everything from papists to revolutionaries, determined to bring down Anglicanism: "Wesley often faced Mob violence and hospitality with no hope of protection from the law or local authorities."[71]

Wesley had to let go of Anglican aspirations, as he was marginalized early on in the church he loved to his dying day. Since being Anglican was equated with being English, his patriotism was questioned as well. Wesley was charged with treason during the French-Scottish attempt to overthrow the King of England, and had to appear in court to answer the charges;[72] and "(the Wesleys) were branded as babblers, insolent pretenders, papists, buffoons in religion, mountebanks in theology; visionary antics in gowns and cassocks, and 'quacks in divinity:'"[73] For Charles Wesley, brought up in an Anglican clergyman's home, this was a lot to take on. He was raised not to rock the boat, and was an unlikely revolutionary.

In MCC we have wrestled with respectability and acceptability. We deal with so many people who come to MCC to heal, to come out, to re-claim their wholeness as people of faith, but who still cling to oppressive churches, because MCC cannot be a "real church," if queer people are in charge. Until recently, coming out as a gay person automatically lowered one's class status, especially with the associations with criminality

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[68] Ibid., 30.
[69] Ibid., 33.
[70] Ibid., 34.
[71] Tyson, 136.
[72] Ibid., 148.
[73] Wilder, 27.

and immorality. This made MCC's respectability and acceptability a challenge, in the tension between assimilation and queer vision.

Charles Wesley was scrupulous about Anglican clerical propriety. He always asked permission from the local Anglican priest to preach in his parish. Only when permission was denied, would Charles preach in other venues. As the crowds grew, they frightened the Anglicans and upset their class boundaries: the invitations were less and less forthcoming.

But Wesley continued to attend the Anglican Church his whole life long, and only receive communion there. The Methodists sent new converts to Anglican parishes that did not want to accommodate them. They began to authorize and train lay preachers who had no hope of receiving orders in the Anglican Church, because of the lack of education and their class.[74] Over time, the lay preachers were not content to do all the work of a pastor without being truly ordained and authorized, and the Church of England would not bend.[75] By authorizing lay preachers they had created a monster that would be out of their control forever. It became impossible for them to see themselves as second class, and as still needing the Anglican Church.

Charles Wesley never really understood this. It is as if he was comfortable preaching to the poor, but when the poor wanted to take ownership of the movement, he could not let them have it or trust them with it. His identification with the classes above him was too great, his need of their approval and acceptance for him and his family too great to sacrifice. When John Wesley finally took authority himself, as Bishop, and

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[74] Tyson, 187.
[75] Ibid., 217.

ordained clergy and other bishops, that went too far for Charles Wesley; and his need to be buried in an Anglican Church yard was too great.

From Valuing Self-in-Relation to Valuing a Friendly God

The difference between MCC and the fundamentalists, or those from more authoritarian Christian orientations, is not so much our view of humanity, our theological anthropology, or sexuality, but our understanding of the nature of God. Walter Brueggemann, in speaking about the tension between God's justice and God's freedom, says, "We are made in the image of some God. And perhaps we have no more important theological investigation than to discern in whose image we have been made."[76] The theologian and pastor, Reinhold Niebuhr, in a sermon, said that Christian faith is not about a set of beliefs, but essentially is trust in God; and not only in God, in "the whole realm of life."[77] He speaks of trusting God and the Universe as a trust in the very adventure of life itself.[78] And, in order to trust God, we have to have at least some of idea of what kind of a God this is.

Niebuhr preached that sermon, just miles from where I was living, at age 11, when I first heard that Voice. Listening to it, I recalled that awakening moment in my life, in which God said S/he was my Friend. Not that God was a loving parent, or even spouse, or sibling, or force, but compassionate Friend. That was the image in which I was made. Perhaps it was out of that existential longing to break free from condemned isolation, and to connect to something beyond myself, that I heard the Voice of One calling me to the

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[76] Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination,* Second Ed., (MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 8.
[77] Reinhold Niebuhr, a sermon, "Faith As Trust," at Union Theological Seminary, New York, 1961. EDS Library, cassett No. 3016.
[78] Ibid.

joy of trusting myself-in-relation to value truth, God and others. This is the great adventure with a trustable Universe that Niebuhr was proposing.

For me, God's friendship meant that the world, the Universe itself, could be friendlier than I had imagined. This was a singular source of hope for me as a frightened queer adolescent in a profoundly misogynist and homophobic world.

Charles Wesley and God

Charles Wesley preached during the Age of Enlightenment, a time of increased religious diversity, and intellectual, rationalist critique of Christianity and the church.[79] On the one hand, the pietism of the Methodist revival is not, on the surface at least, a rationalist rejection of Christian orthodoxy. Methodism seems quite traditional in its doctrine of salvation, redemption and the cross. What differentiated Methodism from other movements was the insistence on the availability of God's love for all people. "There was at the heart of early Methodism an egalitarian mood. It extended to the diversity found in the congregations....The belief that the gospel was for all people, not just the elect, was a bedrock Wesleyan assumption."[80]

In this theology, there is a clear rejection of the extremes of the Calvinist doctrine predestination, and a democratization of salvation, often mislabeled "Arminianism." In this way, Methodism is right in line with the political revolutions of the 18th century, and the impulse to liberate and lift up all of humanity. Charles Wesley's anti-predestination, thirty-six verse (!) hymn, "Universal Redemption" unmasks the hatred towards the "unsaved" that also ends up, functionally, as class-based hatred: "Horror to think that

[79] Tyson, 4.
[80] Ibid., 82.

God is hate! Fury in God can dwell! God could an helpless world create, To thrust them into hell!!"[81] Charles preaching was as close to heresy in his day as someone today preaching that God not only accepts queer people, but we are part of the wonderful variety of creation.

Wesley's dilemma was the same one that Jesus confronted. In his time, poor people were automatically classed as "sinners," and not eligible to be included among the people of God. Jesus' controversial ministry centered on table fellowship with those labeled "sinners" and "unclean" whom he welcomed into Paradise. Hanging out with outcasts meant he experienced all the hatred that they experienced from religious people.

Rev. Troy Perry, the Founder of MCC, is fond of saying, "God didn't create LGBT people so God could sit around and have someone to hate!" The bumper sticker that proclaims, "Hate is not a family value," refers to the hateful rhetoric of the religious right toward LGBT people and our rights. There is a powerful connection from Jesus, to Wesley to MCC, as we overturn the hateful theology that comes from oppression. Charles Wesley's life and ministry, was a journey of trust, in God and humanity: of broken, restored trust, and at times, unresolved trust. The most dominant pervasive theme in Charles Wesley's life, preaching and hymns is the absolute trustworthiness of the love of God for all people. Love is a synonym for trust in his theology.

When I consider the "central relational paradox," that Jean Baker Miller talks about,[82] I think of our relationship to God. Wesley intuitively knew that the oppressed people he

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[81] Tyson, 103.

[82] Jordan, 28, "Though we deeply desire and need connections, we are terrified of what will happen if we move into the vulnerability necessary to make deep connection, so we keep large aspects of ourselves out of connection. We develop strategies of disconnection."

served were held captive to that paradox. I hear the prophet Hosea talking about the way God is calling and reaching to us sometimes, with this painful, paradoxical result: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me."[83] Our relationship to God, not only to other people, is impacted by the fear of letting God know us, and us really knowing God.

For many decades now, feminists and fellow travelers have been attempting to overthrow the centrality, in many Christian systems, of what they see as a distorted view of the atonement as the central, controlling idea behind Christology. Marcus Borg eloquently and succinctly summarizes the five major interpretations of the cross, only the fifth of which is really related to atonement. He says that the common, contemporary interpretation, "God killed the perfect Jesus to save me, because God is so just and holy and I am so wretchedly sinful," is perhaps only 900 years old, not authentic to early Christianity, to the gospels, or to the Biblical view.[84]

If creating and restoring friendship with God, creation and humanity is the goal of a spiritual life, then challenging certain theologies of atonement, or queering them, is an important task. The doctrine of atonement that many of us grew up with is not friendly to queer people, women, or poor people. Carter Heyward writes:

> The deity we must reject is the one whose power over us is imagined to be His love, the God who morally can destroy us....Moreover, in the context of such distorted spiritualities, violence often is experienced as passionate erotic....The deep roots in Christianity of a psychosexual spirituality that links sex and violence are being cultivated to this day by a twisted understanding of atonement that is assumed by most Christians to be right

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[83] Hosea 11:1 and 2 (NIV).
[84] Marcus Borg, *The Heart of Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2003), 92-96.

> and central to Christian faith....True atonement is the liberation from the powers of evil through God's passion working in our lives.[85]

Marie Fortune, founder of the Faith-Trust Institute,[86] in contrast to Borg, says that the dominant Christian paradigm of atonement is *foundational* to Christianity, which may be the perception. She sees a dynamic connection between this doctrine and the problem of sexual abuse in the church and in Christian cultures: "The teachings and practices of the Christian faith have and continue to be a part of the problem of violence against women and children (I would add people of color, poor people, LGBT people) and we have begun to deconstruct these teachings and practices."[87]

Poor Jesus. I think of how much gets projected onto him, and I wince. He is the "greatest salesman ever," the quintessential Jim Collins level five leader, a left-wing revolutionary, a purpose-driven Savior, a feminist, a liberating black revolutionary, the atonement for all our sin, the re-definer of atonement as fighting the structures of evil, and, of course, queer. It is a testament to the power of the enduring Jesus story that he is so able to be transformed by our desire to identify with him. There are days I comfort myself with the belief that Jesus was also harassed, bewildered, overwhelmed, and questioning his mission and his choices. That there were times he had no idea what he was doing, or why. I also appreciate Mark Jordan's important question of queer incarnation, "If Jesus' body was God's body, how do we begin to tell truths about it?" If

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[85] Heyward, 175-176. When I read John Stott's book *Atonement* and read his chilling vision of the perfect God who could only be "satisfied" with a perfect bloody offering, I knew why so many of the evangelicals come to MCC plenty bloodied themselves.

[86] The Faith-Trust Institute does research, analysis and consulting around sexual and domestic violence in faith communities.

[87] Marie M. Fortune, "Seeking Justice and Healing: Violence Against Women as an Agenda for Feminist Christianity", from *New Feminist Christianity,* eds. Hunt and Neu, (Woodstock, Vermont: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2010), 148.

Jesus was God with skin on, and skin is a metaphor for trust, how is Jesus the locus of trust in the human/Divine connection?

At the intersection of queer incarnation and atonement, I find Kittredge Cherry's queer vision of Jesus, in the series, *Jesus in Love*[88] challenging. She wrote the books, which portray Jesus in erotic friendships, as a way to open to God's healing of her body from chronic illness.[89]

> Through the writing process, I grappled with why an all-powerful, all-loving God would let people suffer, a question that felt immediate and all-consuming as I struggled daily with debilitating fatigues and pain. The sexuality aspect (of Jesus) came naturally and served as a respite from the thorny theodicy issue (in her own inner dialogue).... Jesus says I lived my life as a love letter to people in the future. You can help deliver it.[90]

Cherry's quite graphic account of the crucifixion does not embrace atonement theology at all, but sounds more like the medieval mystics. She imagines Jesus' transformation of his own suffering, on the cross, in union with God this way:

> In my own personal dreamscape, I offered my divine heart as a meal for all human souls throughout time as I stretched and spread open on the cross. I wasn't sure who to feed first: the lonely who crave love, the heart-broken who fear love, or those who have been loved so well that they smile in trust at the demons who try to destroy them. Eventually they all came and gorged themselves. Some felt like ravenous ghosts with beaks and talons, but I wasn't afraid. I knew that my heart was endless and that every being was my own creation.[91]

Feminist theologian Kwok Pui Lan pushes us to move beyond doctrinal discussions to a different vision of incarnation. "To connect the centuries old Christian misgivings about the body, I am proposing that we understand the Christian notion of

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[88] Kittredge Cherry, *Jesus in Love: At the Cross* (Berkeley: Andro/Gyne Press, 2008).
[89] Cherry, 10-11.
[90] Cherry, 11.
[91] Cherry, 221.

incarnation not as a religious belief, but as a spiritual practice. Incarnation is the divine meeting the body so that the body can fully reveal the grace of God."[92]

Sometimes, it has seemed to me that some of the discomfort about atonement has been about body itself, its messiness, what happens when bodies suffer. Our theology cannot be so sanitized that it cannot include body, sexuality, pleasure, pain or suffering. There is much that is rich and powerful in the image of a vulnerable Jesus, who risks everything, trusting himself-in-relation to his destiny, his ministry, his faithfulness to the One who sent him, and to those to whom he was sent. So much of the pain in the world is bodily pain, the result of preventable violence. This daily crucifixion of so many is not something we can just turn away from, and call ourselves followers of Jesus.

Practicing incarnation as the way we heal our trust and friendship with God, creation and humanity, is the way of justice and of any viable future of a Christianity Jesus might recognize.

Today, the world of queer faith and Christianity looks so different, globally, than forty years ago, when no one imagined gay marriage or an MCC in Pakistan. Movements led by young queer people, yearning for an opportunity to live in freedom, with human rights, and the right and opportunity to practice their faith and spirituality is the present and future.

Today, the Arab world, in particular, is erupting from the ground up, as people throw off decades, even millennia, of oppression. The rest of the world watches in hope and fear. Kwok Pui Lan prophesies, "The future of feminist Christianity is not located at

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[92] Kwok Pui Lan, "A Post-Colonial Feminist Vision for Christianity," from *New Feminist Christianity,"* ed Hunt and Neu, (Woodstock, Vermont: Skylight Path Publishing, 2010), 8.

the center of the bureaucratic church, but at the margins and in other subversive spaces."[93] That is the future of queer Christianity as well. The future depends on hope for those who have had no hope, including queers, women, and the majority of those in the world suffering from poverty, racism and injustice. The intersectionality of all things, of all oppression and liberation, is key to changing the world.

This will be the century of queer folk, rising out of silence and "condemned isolation," into a place of friendship with the self-in-relation, with other, with church, with the authorities we claim and choose, with God, with the future God holds open for us. It is time for us to claim our place as trustworthy leaders, in the church and the world.

[93] Kwok, 5.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PRACTICE OF BECOMING/CREATING TRUSTWORTHY LEADERS IN METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH

In late 2008, one of the goals stemming from my 360 degree evaluation[1] was to begin to work on succession planning for my position as Moderator, and for the Elders and senior leadership of MCC. Rev. Elder Don Eastman, my colleague on the Board of Elders for decades, was my evaluator/consultant. He was particularly concerned that as I begin my next term as Moderator, with a view to retiring from that position in 2016, that I focus more of my attention on leadership development as a part of that succession planning.

In early 2009, I began to work on the idea for a Leadership Mentoring Retreat, in the context of my research on trust and trustworthy leadership. We held the first retreat in January 2010, the second in January 2011, with a goal of holding two per year, for the next six years, for at least 200 people in total.

This is something Troy Perry would never have done. As an entrepreneur he did not see the necessity for a process for leadership development. He is a "bootstraps" leader—either you are a leader, or you are not! Not that he didn't mentor anyone—he just did not take a systematic approach to it. Mentoring was not front and center for him: it happened on the side, in the process of shaping the movement. True to a being a founder, he never had an evaluation of any kind.

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[1] MCC Elders and Senior Leaders have what is called a 360 evaluation for professional development at least once every three years. This kind of evaluation includes input from one's supervisor, peers, colleagues, those one supervises, and those in the field who are served by one's ministry. From that evaluation, a plan with specific goals for professional improvement and personal growth is developed for which one is accountable.

There is no question that my desire to do this work around mentoring trustworthy leaders is also influenced by feminist theology, psychology and politics, and my personal style. I enjoyed teaching and mentoring, and nurturing new leaders as a pastor, and I love doing it in this new role. As I have grown into the role of Moderator these last five years, I have been motivated to find, nurture, call out, and encourage level five leaders, those who have that key mix of personal characteristics and gifts described by Jim Collins, for MCC's long term future.[2]

As an admirer of Mohammed Yunnus, I was sobered by reading about his recent troubles in the courts of Bangladesh. This Nobel Peace prize laureate and founder of microcredit is 70 years old. A recent news article states:

> Lost in the talk of politics is a more complex question: how to ensure that Grameen Bank, which has 8.3 million borrowers, has loaned $10 billion and has become an indispensible part of Bangladesh's social and economic fabric, outlives its charismatic founder? Mr. Yunnus is now a decade beyond the bank's mandatory retirement age, and apparently there is no successor in sight. Long-serving internal candidates that might have replaced Mr. Yunnus as the bank's managing director after his retirement have departed acrimoniously.[3]

I do not want such an article to be written about me, or MCC. When I retire at 66 as MCC Moderator, I want to know that there are many excellent candidates for our top leadership positions, who will be faithful to MCC's legacy, but bold enough to help re-shape it for the future. Bill Kondrath says, "Perhaps the most significant transition in a religious community is the transition from a charismatic founder to the next

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[2] Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...And Others Don't* (New York: Harper Business, 2001), 20.
[3] Lydia Polgree, "Microcredit Pioneer Faces an Inquiry in Bangladesh," *The New York Times,* Sunday, January 30, 2010, 19.

generation…(which is) not merely a shift in who is the leader, but an organizational shift."[4] In some ways, even with the preparation we did for Troy's retirement, it is only in my second term that these organizational shifts are being implemented and embraced. In addition, Troy's tenure was very long, thirty seven years, and, though I am so different from him, I am from the same founding generation.[5] It is the next Moderator and top leadership that will really embody a new generation of leadership altogether. So, for MCC, maybe it will take two leadership changes to make that transition!

This was the motivation to develop a diverse faculty that helped shape a high-quality Leadership Mentoring Retreat which would inspire lay and clergy leaders to intensify a journey in MCC leadership. The design of this program required each person to apply. The applicants themselves need to take that first step. They have to have some inkling, some impulse or motivation to pursue this dream. Some have long held hopes or ambitions of being an MCC leader; others had not really considered this option before. For some, the decision to apply was the beginning of the adventure.

In late 2011, we will hold a special Leadership Mentoring Retreat for young adults, thirty-five years old and under, for the first time. We hope to focus one retreat a year on young adults for several years.

With my learning and reflection on MCC's culture and role in history; learning about organizations and trust; mining of theological resources; and in view of the present

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[4] Kondrath, "Transitioning from Charismatic Founder to the Next Generation," 83.

[5] This came home to me at a recent trip to the White House, when I was being introduced, incorrectly, by LGBT religious leaders (I am probably the oldest and most senior in leadership person in that group) to White House staff as the person, who with Troy Perry, founded MCC! I was momentarily horrified, until I realized that for everyone around that table, that was their perception, even though I came into MCC four years after MCC started. Most of them were children, some not born, when that happened. That includes the White House staff!

realities of MCC and the need for greater organizational, institutional trust, these are the principles I have distilled.

Trust Principles and Applications for Leadership Training and Development in MCC

Trust is a dynamic that happens (or not!) in authentic relationship, rather than an individual character trait. It is a "we" not and "I" phenomenon. It is born of "subject/subject" relationships, not in objectifying relationships.[6] It is the result of what Martin Buber called the "I-Thou" relationship,[7] and how Jesus positioned relationship with him "love one another as I have loved you;"[8] "inasmuch as you have done it to the least of these, you have done it to me."[9] Trust requires the awareness of self-in relation I talked about in last chapter, which opens to awareness of the other.

> TASK: All leaders need to learn about the dynamics of trust, and building trust. Becoming trustworthy is a skill that begins with awareness of self-in-relation, and can be learned.[10] It must be learned in the context of building relationships, often across boundaries. In MCC, it is about repairing trust in individuals and communities. It requires practicing being vulnerable; and recognizing that those who have core character or psychological problems with trustworthiness (who are often attracted to church life) need to be screened for leadership positions and/or monitored carefully.

Trust requires sophisticated power analysis: understanding social location, the dynamics of oppression; postcolonial analysis; racism, etc. Without attending to these issues, trust may build prematurely or superficially. This takes time, practice and

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[6] Wonhee Anne Joh, "Violence and Asian American Experience: From Abjection to *Jeong*," *Off the Menu* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 151.
[7] Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York: Scribners, 1970), p. 3.
[8] John 15:12 (NIV).
[9] Matthew 25:40 (NIV).
[10] Stephen M.R. Covey, *The Speed of Trust: The One Thing That Changes Everything* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 25.

intentionality. Using a methodology such as the well-established VISIONS, Inc.,[11] training program, or proven diversity training, and updating, is essential. It also requires risk to move out of one's comfort zone, to ask questions about privilege, about the structures of power in one's own organization, or the ways in which rhetoric and reality do not match.

> TASK: Trust for MCC leaders requires understanding and engaging these issues, and continuous learning. It means learning and internalizing MCC values, guidelines for recognizing and values differences, as a core competency in our organization, all of which impact and improve trust.[12] Embracing diversity as a gift to be cherished.

Trust begins with appreciating differences, which makes them liberating, not just appropriating or "borrowing" them.[13] In one sense, this is the queerest feature of creating trust: that trust is needed because there is some difference or barrier to overcome, some way in which we are not just identical. Trust requires that we go against the grain of "homogenization," and actually seek to create bridges across small or profound differences. One of our interesting challenges is generational: we are trying to welcome a new generation of younger people whose sexuality is more fluid, who do not care as much about the "LGBT" label, who are as likely to be socially connected in ways that were not as common with my generation.

> TASK: Especially as a queer community that is changing, to implement diversity training at all levels; making sure that core to our training is understanding a vision of a post-colonial reality. To not seek to clone

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[11] Kondrath, *God's Tapestry*, 258.

[12] Ibid., 4 -5. The guidelines are: Try on; It's Ok to disagree, it's not okay to shame, blame or attack oneself others; Practice self-focus; Practice 'both/and' thinking; Be aware of intent and impact; Take 100 percent responsibility for one's own learning; Maintain confidentiality; It's OK to be messy; Say ouch.

[13] Jung Ha Kim, "Spiritual Buffet: The Changing Diet of America," *Off the Menu* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 80-81.

> ourselves, or to make everyone in the world "like us." To help those aspiring to be leaders to confront their need to unlearn racism, sexism, homophobia, adultism, and other patterns of thought and behavior that stigmatize difference.

Healthy trust must be balanced with healthy mis-trust (or suspicion). To really trust authority means to be able to question it and the dominant narrative. We must question people, sources, texts, institutions, traditions, our own experience, etc., with our own "hermeneutic of suspicion." Problems often arise when we either trust too glibly without questioning, are perhaps lazy about doing our homework; or mis-trust as a matter of habit or course, rather than risk trusting reasonably. This is a challenge in a culture where we tear down leaders rather than lift them up. MCC leaders often feel the sting from those who are either envious, or who think it is their role to keep us humble, or to bring us down. On the other side of it, there is a hunger to have heroes, and people in our community to elevate and admire. So, it is the pedestal or the trash heap. There are many who aspire to be leaders, just so they will feel worthy, or included, which is not a healthy reason. There are others who make a career or cause of harassing and battering leaders they believe should not be leaders.

While I know this happens in all denominations, I observe it too often in MCC. The whole community may be held hostage by someone who needs to leave the church and get a life, but thinks destroying a pastor or a church is their true purpose. MCC pastors and leaders struggle to dis-engage from such people, and it is difficult. Normal measures for dealing with conflict sometimes do not work. On the other hand, the pedestal can be seductive as well. Getting to a more balanced view of leaders, of

ourselves as leaders, is important. My friend, Fr. Malcolm Boyd was fond of saying of LGBT leaders, "We ought to be a little careful about believing our own press releases."[14]

> *TASK*: Resist collapsing the polarity, and allow the tension between healthy trust and mis-trust to be a place of growth and creativity. Take risks, but also ask the right questions, insist on answers. Support leaders and hold them accountable. Hold all members accountable for behaviors that bless and do not tear down leaders or communities.

Trust must be grounded in truth, truth telling, and truth receiving. Borrowing Dr. Kwok Pui-lan's phrase, "sanctioned ignorance,"[15] we must insist on creating a big enough context so as not to trivialize what is at stake in any relationship or endeavor. Whether this is talking about the realities of the suffering of women seduced into sex tourism, or acknowledging that "Christian Mission was a colonial project,"[16] or understanding the nuances of dealing with sexual minorities and law reform in Jamaica, Pakistan or Uganda, the complexity of truth must be taken seriously.

> TASK: reward truth-telling, even when it is institutionally awkward or painful. Do not punish truth-tellers. Work on strategies for telling and hearing difficult truth. Help leaders accept that they must have truthful feedback and alternative points of view must be welcome for a system to stay healthy and engaged. Skillful truth-telling is core to supporting the "prophetic imagination" of any church. Overcome sanctioned ignorance by cultivating curiosity about the world and the many contexts in which MCC is finding itself and growing.[17]

Trust requires humility, the capacity to listen deeply, the willingness to be held accountable, and to learn from mistakes. Shannon Clarkson speaks of Letty Russell's

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[14] Malcolm Boyd, private conversation.
[15] Kwok, from a lecture at EDS on post-colonial theory, 2009.
[16] Letty Russell, "God, Gold, Glory and Gender: A Postcolonial View of Mission," *International Review of Mission*, 93 (2004), 41.
[17] Walter Brueggeman, *The Prophetic Imagination,* Second Edition, (MN: Fortress Press, 2001).

understanding of the "constructivist and transformational" nature of education;[18] and the ways in which the work of liberation is "a grand letting go."[19] Education is a humbling process, as we are introduced to all we do not yet grasp. Russell trusted the process of liberative education that humbles one in the process, which includes the letting go of assumptions, "unlearning," and letting go of power and privilege. Jim Collins, guru of business and organization success, talks about this in terms of humility as the hallmark of a "level 5 leader."[20]

> TASK: Cultivate humility, accurate self-awareness, in leaders. Help leaders to see themselves as encouragers of their successors and future colleagues. Help MCC leaders to understand the seduction of power and privilege, sometimes cleverly masked in an emerging institution like ours, that does not see itself as possessing or conferring such power and privilege–not true! A liberated leader is a humble leader, willing to let go, delegate, and hand over power and responsibilities to others who have been prepared to lead.

Trust encourages the testing and sharing of values. How do we answer the question, "What is liberating?" unless we have shared language about values? How can we foster trust, unless we explore what is most dear to us, spiritually, and in all ways? I have often thought that what holds MCC together is not so much our common doctrine, or liturgical practice; but our "founding narrative," and the core spiritual values that are our passion in ministry. I think of Letty Russell's clearly expressed value of a "feminist

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[18] Shannon Clarkson, "Translation, Education and Liberation," *Liberation Eschatology: Essays in Honor of Letty M. Russell,* eds. Serene Jones and Margaret A. Farley (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 9.
[19] Clarkson, 12.
[20] Jim Collins, 39.

missiology based on God's mission as *a gift of welcome for all in each place.*"[21] With the enormous diversity in theology, church background, culture, language, etc; what holds MCC together is the sense of participation in God's holy history and justice-movement, and those core values.

> TASK: Identify those core values and founding narratives, test them, and question them as part of the process of creating trust. This must include processes to acknowledge failure, and promote forgiveness, and restoration of relationship. Trust requires authenticity, patience and perseverance over time. It has become clear to me that MCC is not for everyone. There are people who are too wedded to a denominational culture or structure from which they came, or some doctrine or belief that they need all of MCC to share. Others are not willing to pay the cost associated, still, with being part of an "Upstart Denomination from the Margins."[22]

Trust is ultimately fruitful. Trustworthy leaders foster trustworthy organizations and institutions, which can be fruitful and liberative. Whether the "fruit" is a food pantry, a "safe house" for activists; a common meal; an organization to save the environment, or one that seeks to articulate a new theology, trustworthy relationships undergird them all. For MCC this is clearly illustrated by the work being done to form our Global Justice Institute. We are beginning to see the fruit of many years of building relationships with human rights organizations that were suspicious of churches. We learned to work with other LGBT religious groups that had less international experience than MCC, but many resources to contribute. As we have put the needs of activists in the field first, and

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[21] M. Shawn Copeland, "Journeying to the Household of God," *Liberation Eschatology: Essays in Honor of Letty M. Russell,* ed. Serene Jones and Margaret A. Farley Russell (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 41.

[22] Craig Van Gelder, *The Missional Church and Denomination: Helping Congregations Develop a Missional Identity,* Missional Church Series. (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdman's Publishing, 2008), 33. He says that "Upstart Denominations from the margins. . .provide identity and often access to the broader society."

worried less about who gets credit for doing what, we have strengthened our credibility and gained greater capacity to make a meaningful contribution. In addition, one of the things that it is hard for us to do is to stop and celebrate success, to really take in all that has been accomplished.

> TASK: Identify and celebrate the fruits of trustworthy leadership, building a trustworthy institutional style, and partnership. And persevere. Find ways to stop and reflect, and enjoy the fruit!

The Recent MCC Context for Using and Evaluating these Principles:

In 2008, MCC's leadership began a process to review the present MCC global structure, which had been implemented in 2002 and 2003, in anticipation of the retirement of our founder, Rev. Troy Perry. In some ways, we intuitively knew that "what needs to take place is a shift from trust in the leader to confidence in the community, its goals and structure."[23]

As Moderator, with input from our senior leaders, I appointed a team of people we believed to have a high level of trustworthiness, both lay and clergy. They had served the denomination for a long time, understood the values and the structure, but were not necessarily seen as "in the pocket" of the Moderator, Elders or other leaders. These were people who would take the task to heart, listen to others, to "the grassroots," and who would tell us the truth as they saw it, and stand up to us if necessary.

We created this Structure Review Team (SRT) in late 2008, with a simple charge and mandate. They had about a year to do their work: to review all aspects of the

[23] Kondrath, "Transitioning from Charismatic Founder to the Next Generation," 96.

structure, to conduct surveys and interviews, and to make recommendations to the Elders and Board of Administration for a vote at General Conference 2010.

With the changing economy, in advance of that final report, during 2009, with the support of the Board of Administration, I had to downsize the senior leadership of MCC by about one third, make other staff cuts, as we struggled to manage finances and balance out the work.

I knew that some in MCC might see this in a conspiratorial way, as though we were "pre-empting" changes we might be anticipating from the SRT. We assured them that that was not true, and included the SRT as we went along, so they would understand the temporary changes and not be taken off guard. However, right up until the proposals were considered by Conference, there were a few, loud, persistent voices that tried to call into question the integrity of our process because we had made these needed adjustments.

The SRT came to us in December of 2009 with their recommendations. This was a very committed team. Because of the financial crisis, we had not funded them to meet face to face, yet they met, paying their own way. They were deeply invested in the work, and I knew there would be disappointment if we did not embrace their recommendations wholeheartedly. They understood that the Elders and Board of Administration had complete authority to use or disregard their recommendations, and said they were fine with reporting to us and letting go, but I knew they were very passionate about what they thought were the key diagnostic issues, and the key solutions. I was uncomfortable, as well, with the fact that we had not properly funded their work, and that they had made serious personal investments. How easy would it really be to let go?

In addition, two people on this team were veterans from a former group that had made some suggestions to the leadership about five years ago. These suggestions did not take into account the financial constraints at that time. That was not communicated well at all, and the fact that their research and suggestions seemed to be dismissed casually, caused negative feelings that had not been resolved. It was very important, whatever the outcome, for them to trust this process. Their experience the last time was that it appeared as if the Elders and Executive Director had had an outcome in mind, and they really did not want to hear the team's input. I had to assure our SRT that the Elders and Board of Administration had no pre-conceived notions this time. I was able to help the Elders really stick to this. The Board of Administration did end up sending their own ideas about the review and restructuring, as a "package," which the SRT felt was a little more meddling than they wanted. But, the SRT was grateful that the Elders, the more influential group, did not come to them with our own restructuring document, but let them do their work first.

As it turned out, there was a lot we liked in the final SRT recommendations, especially in their diagnosis and key points. And, there were some key, crucial disagreements. We were under the pressure of time to announce proposals, so they could be reviewed by MCC churches and leaders before our Conference in July of 2010. MCC churches had a history of being cranky about making major changes without enough time and consultation. Of course, the internet, and the speed at which information can now flow helps improve the timeframes in which information and ideas can be absorbed. Because of economics, the fact that we have fewer face to face meetings means that the

kinds of negotiating that used to happen over a longer time, with more face to face meetings cannot happen.[24] Could people adjust to a newer way of doing things, embrace more frequent, faster internet connections, and could we use that to build trust, in the absence of as many face to face opportunities on the grand scale?

We did hold many, smaller, face to face meetings at the level of congregations and smaller gatherings of 10 to 15 congregations to consider and give feedback to the proposals. That helped a lot, and maybe helped us make a cultural shift: Often, major changes required approval by the General Conference, which used to take three to four years. Since Conferences now happen only once every three years, can the internet, our smaller church Networks, improve the sense of access and communication, of sharing of information, that can create more trust and speed up the process? Kondrath notes that these kinds of face to face meetings I describe "are not simply about change, they are a part of the change. They are the beginning of a structural shift."[25] In so far as people began to see that their feedback and responses were included in the final product, that they felt listened to, and still had enough time to consider all the implications, it did work.

The Elders and Board of Administration, amazingly, agreed on what we liked and did not support in the SRT proposal. We created an alternative document to share with the SRT, to allow them time to respond. They did, without a lot of enthusiasm, and with considerable push back. This worried me, because I did not want us to ignore their

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[24] Kondrath talks about the importance of "opportunities for face to face meetings where people can ask questions and engage one another around issues of resistance and opposition," "Transitioning," 98. This made me wince, we really have embraced this so much more in our new system. It was the last few months of face to face smaller meetings, in fact, that were the key to the proposal passing, I am sure.
[25] Ibid., 99.

feedback, and ideally I wanted to come into Conference saying that all three groups were in support of the proposal.

Our boards had the authority simply to take their proposal and amend it, and move it on. But the SRT was disappointed, not sure they were heard in all aspects. We could sense their frustration. While there was pressure to move on, I decided instead, to honor the amazing research they had done, and their creativity, and to take one additional, cautious step. This, I think, was perhaps the most important action that created trust across the board in our leadership, even though it also created some anxiety about meeting our deadlines, so that we could give the delegates to conference enough time to consider and give feedback.

This was a choice about creating more trust in the people who would have to campaign for this proposal, or to push forward more quickly with a proposal that did not have enthusiastic support all the way around. And, at the time, no one was sure that we could get there, even with a consultant.

We slowed down the process by a month, invested precious dollars, belatedly, and hired a consultant from Alban Institute to meet with representatives from the Elders, the Board of Administration and the SRT.[26] As we did this, it was so clear to me, in hindsight that we should have done this months before. That was a huge learning. In some ways, we had let the SRT down by not adequately funding their work in the first place, and not providing an outside consultant who could help them in the initial phases

[26] Ibid., 84. Kondrath also emphasizes the importance of using outside consultants for this kind of key transition work. This was a lesson I especially internalized this round.

of their work. In some sense, slowing the process down was an attempt to restore some of that trust.

Working for two very intense days, the joint team that represented all of the leadership groups came to a unified plan that all of us felt good about, and that we were confident our groups would endorse. Our consultant had wisely taken the things we agreed on, built on that, and then did some education in areas where we had disagreement, pushing us through to resolution. One of the things she did that helped enormously was to educate us about church polity, and help us recognize the gifts, strengths and even contradictions of our hybrid model. She also helped us to see how much trust had been broken around not adhering to some key financial principles. This really influenced our final decisions, and the work of our new Board.

Rev. Elder Don Eastman, semi-retired, but helping to staff the SRT, at that face to face meeting offered a key theological insight around MCC's culture, how we embrace spiritual leadership roles, and how we should integrate that into our new system. His clear presentation was convincing to some who perhaps wanted a more purely non-profit or corporate model. Don's role as a senior statesman was so helpful—perhaps because we are still young to have very many of them, and because so many who would have been those senior statesmen, especially men, died. Everyone sees Don as an ally, as rooted deeply in the values of MCC, as wise, practical and theologically "centrist."

Within a month, we refined and published the draft version that went to the churches for review. Almost immediately, I could tell that it hit a nerve, and was going to pass.

Embedded in the proposal were some long-needed correctives, that were all about creating and sustaining trust: better financial accountability and transparency and learning to live within our means in challenging financial times. We replaced large regions that did not provide a real sense of care and connection with much smaller, manageable, volunteer lead "networks" that could gather more frequently and provide meaningful church-to-church connections. We also created clarity in the overall governing structure that parallels the local church structure which everyone in MCC already understands.

The leadership, including the SRT, took the proposal "on the road," to churches, conferences, and network meetings, and got people on board. We entertained revisions, amendments, additional ideas, and suggestions, all of which continued to be addressed by a drafting team. In truth, that deep, high-level of interacting, real listening, which took a lot of time and commitment from all of our leadership, improved trust. By the time the General Conference happened, many people could see the ways in which they had helped to improve the plan, which created more broad ownership. In this way we were really trying to both overcome the "habit" of unhealthy mis-trust, while also encouraging everyone who could to participate in questioning and improving the proposal. We spent many, many hours answering questions that came to us online, or in person at these face to face meetings.

One of the things I would do, at these gatherings, after explaining the proposal, and answering questions, was to ask their permission to share my perspectives and feelings, as the person who would have the privilege and responsibility to manage this new structure for its first few years. In every case, people were respectful and eager to

hear. I did not pretend to be neutral about the proposal. Interestingly, and so germane to this project, was that one of their major concerns was that this proposal did give more authority and responsibility to the Moderator, especially in choosing top leadership. They would all insist that they had no issues with trusting me about this, but what about my successor? I told them that it did tell them something about what they would be looking for in my successor, and the need to have good checks and balances, which I think the new system does have. And, it was about trusting themselves to make a good, next choice.

We then made a decision to take the additional risky step of preparing to implement the new Board structure immediately. Our present Board of Administration was demoralized, frustrated and happy to let go. We did not feel that our present structure should continue on when we all felt it was not working. We needed to get that new Board structure firmly in place by the end of Conference.

In the past, sometimes, MCCer's did not take kindly to leadership overstepping its bounds. Going ahead and creating a Nominating Team, securing candidates, was all based on the assumption the proposal would pass. We did not want that to deprive the Conference of its authority. At the same time, we now have conferences only once every three years, and if we passed the proposal, and were not prepared to also elect a new Board, we would miss the best opportunity to implement the new structure and move forward. The risk was that we would have wasted our time in a nominations process.

In one sense, this was asking MCC to trust our own processes. The proposal had come from feedback that they had faithfully given; and we were doing everything to

make sure we had a proposal that had widespread support from our churches. We were more and more confident that the proposal would pass. And, because the new proposal hinged on having excellent, authorized leadership for this new Governing Board, it seemed irresponsible not to proceed with a nominations process.

Many who liked the proposal, and the new, unified board structure, that was to be 50/50 clergy and laity, were also skeptical that we could get eight qualified people to serve on this board. That, in some ways, was a measure of a poor, organizational self-perception. If we could not entice eight highly qualified people to lead our denomination, we were in really deep trouble. I did not believe for one minute that that would be our problem.

We did have a terrible time, in the past, recruiting for the Board of Administration. That was because people did not understand the authority or responsibility of that board, and because we had not invested enough resources in training and supporting their work. The lines of authority, decision making and accountability were convoluted. This made it an unattractive volunteer opportunity.

Once that clarity was offered up in the new proposal, we got a very healthy and robust response from well-qualified candidates. When this happened, I knew that the proposal would pass! If good, qualified people in MCC were hopeful enough to apply, this would give hope to the clergy and delegates. The number and quality of applicants itself was a powerful sign to me that MCC was ready to mature as an organization, and to empower, not frustrate, trustworthy leaders. The clarity and simplicity of the proposal itself pushed the clergy and lay delegates to look beyond the proposal itself, to its

implementation. The more they invested in that, the more the proposal was assured of passing. In the end, it was the section on the Governing Board, which was in the original SRT proposal, that passed by the widest margin. Clearly, that structure engendered the most positive response in terms of hope and trust. Once they knew who the candidates were, the delegates were impressed, and excited to see how their leadership could make a difference for MCC.

We spent a good deal of time interviewing many applicants, and finally proposed a slate of ten from which they would choose eight. We could have selected just eight, but it was clear that the General Conference of MCC wanted to make a meaningful choice, and to feel like it had a real choice, and was not merely a rubber stamp. This was one of the many ways in which we wanted the "grassroots" of MCC to really put their fingerprints on this change, to make it theirs.

One of the most controversial parts of the proposal was that MCC Elders, who had once been elected by the General Conference, and then by the Regional Conferences, would no longer be elected at all. In the new system, only the Moderator and this new Governing Board would be elected. As in a local church, the Elders, then, would be hired as Senior Staff, as with a few other key positions. I was not sure at all that the General Conference would relinquish the ability to elect Elders. But, the excitement about the proposal, the ability to elect the Moderator and the Governing Board, made letting go possible. It was a decision to trust the new leadership structure in a profound way. Had we not nominated a Governing Board in advance, I think the proposal about shifting the Elders election to appointment would have been tougher to pass, something I only really

understood in hindsight. That proposal also passed by a wide margin with almost no debate.

I personally participated in every Governing Board candidate interview, and asked some of the tougher questions about including a new expectation of financial support for the denomination from each board member.

The proposal passed overwhelmingly at Conference, and they elected eight new Governing Board members on the first ballot. The General Conference itself was superb, with great worship, teaching and wonderful opportunities for local churches and leaders to learn and grow together, a great context for a challenging business meeting. This was the first time we had gone three years without a Conference, and people were really happy to be altogether. The joy of being together made for a different quality of experience that moved us forward through the difficult issues.

The other "context" for this decision-making was our new relationship with The Fellowship, an African American Pentecostal-leaning LGBT accepting church that is about ten years old, and has lots of deep connections to MCC. We had been working on connecting our leaders, and our movements over the last three years. At this conference they were present, visible, participating. We had an opening plenary talking about issues of race and church and our communities, myths and challenges, in an open way. We modeled a serious, even intimate at times, trust-building conversation at the opening plenary. This gave MCCer's a bigger picture of our impact on others. It named some of the fears and suspicions and awkwardness that come from daring to be in relationship cross-culturally. It named the benefits and joys as well.

One of the most moving, innovative expressions of this relationship was something Rev. Elder Darlene Garner suggested: structuring our business meeting like a worship service. Before we began critical votes on the proposal, and on elections, we invited leaders of The Fellowship to consecrate and serve us communion, in their "way," distributing the cup and wafer, and we all consumed at one time, emphasizing the unity of the Body of Christ. Many people were deeply touched by this gift. It pushed us to think about the global implications of what we decided as a denomination, and to think of our partners. We had many seminary and ecumenical guests as well. This was a reminder that we were accountable not only to ourselves, but to a network of partners, friends of faith, people who care about MCC, leadership, who want to trust us as well.

After Conference, we invested in training the new Governing Board with the Alban Institute board consultant within the first month after they were elected, having learned our lessons from earlier. The board leaned on the consultant, and internalized the idea of functioning as a "policy board," with global delegation to the Moderator for day to day operations. Our staff shared openly about serious concerns, financial, institutional, budgetary, and staffing. That also created a lot of trust at that first meeting.

One of the first challenges of the board was to form an International Task Force to bring program and structure proposals to the next General Conference in 2013. Having learned a lot through the SRT process, we are well on our way, having learned about recruiting leadership, and using a thorough interview process to select candidates.

What Worked in this Process from the Principles of Trust:

Our (now former) boards, practiced awareness of self-in-relation, and held in high value our relationships with each other and the SRT, and were faithful to the process.

We used our power well and wisely. There were some who worried that we had given too much authority to the SRT, and that if we did not embrace their recommendations, there would be an undercurrent or a backlash. Taking the extra time and steps produced a better and unifying solution.

The SRT recognized, that as mostly Americans (there was one person from Europe on their team) they were not equipped to deal with the looming questions of our global ministry. We know that we need to hear from those most affected, who have been on the margins of our power structure, and to include them in the next phase of decision-making.

We took a reasonable risk in nominating a Governing Board slate ahead of time.

We risked in reaching out to the Fellowship, and that relationship has enriched our leadership, and many of our churches, beyond measure.

We engaged difficult truths about our history, and our structure, and our financial history and struggles to reign in expenses.

We did not gloss over differences, but took the time to understand and hear each other, to engage difficult truths.

We took some steps to interrupt some unhealthy habits of mis-trust that run deep in our church of deeply wounded people. This took a lot of patience and forbearance at times.

Once we had a unified plan, all parties honorably worked together to educate our voting delegates. All of this engendered more trust.

Every group in this process, and every individual, had to let go. The Board of Administration gracefully let go of their fiduciary responsibility, in an easy and thoughtful transfer of power. The Elders let go of being a board at all, and re-invented themselves, with colleagues, as the Senior Leadership Team. They happily transferred some responsibilities and authority to the new Governing Board. Two Elders have taken overdue sabbaticals. The SRT also let go, completed its task and bowed out. One of them was a successful candidate for the Governing Board.

We are just beginning to see the fruits of the shift in structure, and the benefits of having a unified board, with a balance of clergy and laity, women and men, and professional skills, all devoted to MCC, its mission and future.

The Leadership Mentoring Retreat

We held the first Leadership Mentoring Retreat in the midst of all these difficult challenges and changes. In fact, we were not even sure we were going to have the funds to do it, so we had to scramble to get the first one organized. It took place in the midst of the time we were going through the most difficult negotiations with the SRT on the new proposal, which meant it was a very demanding time for several of our faculty.

We had sixty-two applications for eighteen spots. One had to drop out just before the retreat. We were overwhelmed with the response. This was a signal to me of a cultural shift happening in MCC, in which a lot of people were beginning to see the importance for themselves, and for the denomination, of leadership development.

For the first retreat, we asked people to pay their own transportation, and we invested in their room and board, and all our time. The faculty were investing their time as well, some of whom are staff, some of whom are volunteers.

We want to mentor people who were already leaders in the local church, or who even had had some denominational experience, help them to identify their strengths and weaknesses as leaders, in the MCC global context. Future Moderators, Elders, staff, Governing Board members or denominational volunteers, we hoped, would come from this experience. I used this opportunity to take them into my confidence, and shared very frankly my own views about how the present structure was undermining our progress, and what I hoped for in the new structure going forward. I shared some of the "brutal facts," the stresses MCC and our leaders were facing. This opened things up and encouraged them to take risks as well. As I trusted them, they trusted more, it was clear.

Our faculty included, besides myself: a partially retired white Elder who had served in MCC leadership for decades, who has expertise around leadership and church growth; a white, male lay Leader who has a corporate background in leadership training and development with IBM and ecumenical experience; an African American clergy colleague who has considerable cross-cultural experience, VISIONS training, and MCC staff history in leadership development; and a young Latina, successful church planter, who has special expertise in the uses of technology.

Each faculty member developed modules, and shared them with the others, and we critiqued each other's work. We experimented with a small group format, seeing if we

could have them do significant work in the groups, building trust, in the hopes that they would continue after the retreat.

Over the year since that first retreat, each of the persons in that retreat has exercised leadership in some new ways.[27] For some, that has been mostly local, but for others it has been in the wider denomination.

In the second Leadership Mentoring Retreat, held in January 2011, we made three significant changes. We invited Dr. Mona West, now our senior staff leader for our Office of Formation and Leadership Development to join our faculty. She really improved our Spiritual Disciplines for Transformational Leaders module, and we put that right up front this time. That made a huge impression on the participants. It also put the other leadership modules and my piece on the denomination, in a different light.

Secondly, this time, we spent more of the time in the Justice and Diversity modules using the VISIONS materials. This was also well-received, and opened up a lot of discussion in small groups. It really reflects the core values of MCC, and has to be integrated into any leadership training.

Third, we also modified the expectations and process, so that everyone knew coming in that they were to have a "product" at the end of the retreat: a goal or two, and make a commitment to be accountable to their small group for their ongoing leadership development. We offered a workbook, which included a short journal-like question page at the conclusion of each module that could help them sort out options for the final page, which was for their specific goals and commitments.

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[27] See addendum A on Feedback from the Leadership Mentoring Retreat 2010.

The small groups were the place people shared their goals and commitment, and the two faculty members assigned to each group will meet with that group three or four times in the next year. This time, by being clear about expectations, and having an easy to follow process, everyone was able to set goals, and the circles of trust are more likely to be places that people can go to for accountability and support.

This time we also invited two of the participants to work with the faculty to lead worship. Worship is simple at the retreat, but the two participant musicians really added so much to the experience.

In addition, my presentation also changed dramatically. This year, we were not in an organizational turning point, as in 2010; rather we are on the other side of that process. I talked about the ways in which we were implementing the new structure; and, how we were using our new-found learning around church size theory to restructure our top leadership and staff. I shared things we have only shared with the leadership, so it had an "insider" feel.

Also, in this time, in my presentation, I shared that our staff had come to deep conviction about our lack of a church planting strategy in the US and Canada. I shared our thoughts about why church planting had slowed, and what we were doing to re-invent that process. In our group of participants was a new church planter, who just successfully planted a "pastor-sized" church in Florida.

This group focused a lot more on their spiritual practices, and their commitment to ongoing leadership education and development for themselves. Some had a specific

project they were interested in initiating for MCC as well. This group seemed much more impacted by the call to self-awareness, and to lead a balanced and undivided life.

It occurs to me that most people in MCC, who are LGBT, have had to go through a coming out process, which involves a great deal of self-searching. However, that can create a false sense that we have "done" self-awareness. There was a hunger in this group for taking their journey to the next level, to really engage the next chapter of their lives, and connecting it to their leadership in MCC. Time to focus on themselves was such a gift, and was seen as a luxury, rather than as an expectation of being in ministry or leadership. In addition, this kind of "enrichment," is a rather middle-class concept, that is harder for people from a working class background, even if they have a middle-class education, to grasp and embrace.

Content of the Leadership Mentoring Retreat and Connection to Principles of Trust

The Leadership Mentoring Retreat begins, months in advance, with a reading list, a key text and "pre-reads," mostly on leadership development in a church context.

We arrive on Monday afternoon, the faculty gathers for lunch, reviews the program, makes sure we have all our materials, and checks in.[28]

Sometimes we have local church folks from the area help with transportation, or with food for an opening gathering. We gather in the afternoon, and I give a short opening address, which thanks them for investing their time and money in this experience, that it is a gift to the denomination, and, hopefully, to themselves. I make some observations about MCC today. I and one of them presents the workbook, shares

[28] See Leadership Mentoring Retreat 2011 schedule in addendum B

the expectation that they will have a "product" at the end of the retreat, and an accountability process for the next year to follow.

We then invite each person to share who they are, and why they applied to be here. Each time, this has been very moving. Some are surprised they were chosen, some are not even sure why they are here. Some of these folks know each other, others no almost no one at the retreat. Then we have our first module on spiritual formation of leaders, and a brief small group interaction, just to introduce the small groups. At dinner, they sit in their small groups, with two faculty advisors, and share the story of one trustworthy leader who had an influence on them, and why.

We gather again, and see a clip from the movie "Call Me Troy," about the founding of MCC, which is always emotional. Then Rev. Elder Don Eastman, a pioneer MCC leader, and expert on leadership, shares from his heart about leadership in MCC.

The next two days, we begin with worship, and hear lectures and discussion on spiritual formation, leadership development, and leadership styles. I also make a presentation on "MCC as a Denomination and Movement." I offer my perspective on MCC as a denomination, our history, our ecclesiology, our identity. I ask them to think about the assimilationist and queer impulses in MCC, and how they position themselves in that polarity. Each of these modules includes time for discussion in the whole group, and small group work.

We also have modules on the VISIONS work, on technology and "generational shifts," on using technology in our global work and church planting work. This brings a

lot of energy and excitement. We also have a module on stewardship as a component of leadership.

On the next to last day, we end the afternoon with a time of walking the Labyrinth, giving extra time for individual prayer, walking meditation, and writing.

At dinner one evening, we invited Governing Board members who live nearby to join us and share with this retreat about their new ministry. This did not turn out as I had hoped. It was kind of flat. I have since realized that we had really failed to prepare them for this group, and had asked them the wrong questions! The purpose for inviting them was not to fill them in on the work of the board, to hear how it is going, and ask questions, in an accountability way, or to act as a listening post for constituents. What we should have done was to ask the Board members to reflect on their own journeys, their own spiritual practices, sharing what sustains them in leadership. That would have really been a more relevant and important discussion. Next time!

One evening, after dinner, Rev. Elder Don Eastman and I shared "war stories," from the first decade or two of MCC, telling Troy Perry stories, or stories about ourselves. People love this time. Most of these leaders were not in MCC in the 1970's or even the 1980's. We share early folklore and even outrageous, queer stories that they have never heard. They are stories of courage, humor, humanness and vulnerability. We display our affection for each other, and for MCC's early characters and founder. It is an "insider" experience.

We close on Thursday with a significant time in small groups, finalizing each person's goal or goals and commitments for the upcoming year. Then we have a

"covenanting," a Taize-style worship service, including communion. We share a final meal together and depart.

The faculty is very conscious of being open, and sharing ourselves, as learners who are leaders. We share not just from their strengths and successes, but from our weaknesses and failures. The generosity and openness of the faculty is key to building trust. This is a chance to see leaders and mentors as human beings. This kind of intimacy also engenders trust. We are not above them, different from them, superior to them.

I think the VISIONS material also really pushes the participants to do more work on appreciating differences and pushing the envelope. It may be easy for MCCers to feel "accomplished" about embracing diversity, when we are not. Everyone was challenged by this material.

There are people who come to the retreat in some kind of crisis –vocationally, or personally. It is important for the retreat to be a safe space for everything that comes up. For some, it has been a doorway to healing, hope and a renewed sense of purpose and call. For others, it is confirmation of something they have known all their lives, and are getting ready to step into.

Conclusion

I feel very blessed to have had the opportunity to create the Leadership Mentoring Retreat as a work in progress, as one of a number of opportunities in MCC to train and encourage new leaders, and to grow in my own understanding of what it means to be a trustworthy leader. I am encouraged by the ways in which our new structure reflects and

supports a culture shift in the transition from our founder, and the new competencies we are gaining as a trustworthy organization.

CONCLUSION

This project has been enormously challenging and fruitful. I am grateful to have taken some extra time to allow for a second Leadership Mentoring Retreat and to be able to compare and improve on the experience.

My own learning about leadership impacts me every day, now, as I lead in the new MCC system. There is not a day that goes by that I do not use the information I absorbed and the principles I discerned in developing leaders in MCC. I am more conscious of the need to mentor younger, upcoming leaders, and to invest my time and energy in them.

And, now, everywhere I go, whatever I read, events in the world and in the church all speak to me of the tremendous need for developing trustworthy leaders in MCC, in the church and in the world. This is the world of the rest of my life, I am aware, and it is all around me.

As the President of Egypt was resigning, a crisis was created due to the lack of succession planning was painful. The new ways in which leadership is defined by movements, in groups, and not just in one charismatic leader is a generational shift. The joyous thing and the frightening thing about changes in Egypt and the Arab world is that there are not necessarily obvious successors to these long-time, oppressive, post-colonial leaders (who still act like they are the colonizers). At the same time, so many young leaders worked together for years, cooperatively, undercover, with enormous energy, creativity and at great risk to themselves to overthrow these oppressive regimes. Surely, there is enough leadership there to create a body politic and an economy that is more democratic and just.

These events have made me think about what is means for me to have turned 60, and to know that I will be retiring in less than six years. The sentence in the Leadership Covenant, *"***Believe that 'anything worth doing takes more than a lifetime to achieve;' strengthen our movement by giving away our leadership, mentoring others and letting go when it is time,"** was me preaching to myself.

Fortunately, my predecessor, Rev. Troy Perry, was incredibly gracious about letting go, and supporting me completely as I became Moderator of MCC. I have a great role model in that, and hope I can live up to his example. I am starting to let myself imagine life after being the Moderator of MCC. How will my vocation re-shape itself? What will the Holy Spirit talk me into? What adventures await, in mentoring more leaders, in pioneering something new.

I wanted to conclude my study of trust, and the story of the development of the Leadership Mentoring Retreat for MCC, with a gift to our denomination and our emerging leaders.

At first, I had the idea of working on a baptismal covenant for MCC, since we do not have one, and we claim baptism as one of our two sacraments. However, I know this is on the agenda of our Theologies Team, and think their collaborative, conversational process would be better than for one person to write it, since I am no Thomas Cranmer!

I wrote this Leadership Covenant a couple of months ago, and then invited alumni from both Leadership Mentoring Retreats, our faculty, and our Senior Leadership Team, to comment on it, offer feedback or improvements.

Truthfully, I wish it were shorter and less wordy. Several folks approached it from an editing standpoint, and made excellent grammatical and other improvements. Some offered questions for clarification, others submitted a sentence or even a paragraph that they thought was missing. No one offered to make it even as short as the Decalogue.

I appreciated the thoughtfulness, and thoroughness of the responses, and would expect nothing less from this group.

Uses of the Covenant:

My hope is that this is a covenant that can be owned and used by the Leadership Mentoring Retreat, expressive of the values of trustworthy leadership in our context. I hope it can also be used by our boards and professional staff. It would be excellent to create a study guide that could accompany the covenant. It could also be shared in other leadership training events—at Network gatherings, Readiness to Enter Vocational Ministry retreats (our clergy entry process); for our new L.E.A.D program (our first lay-developed certification program, that will be launched this year), and other denominational opportunities.

It would be good to see if churches could adopt or adapt this for their leadership. I have already heard of one large MCC church that is planning to use our Leadership Mentoring Retreat model in their local church, using much of the materials we use.

It could also be used liturgically, perhaps even antiphonally, in denominational or local church worship. It would probably need to be adapted or shortened for that to work. And, of course, Marsha Stevens could make it rhyme and set it to music![1]

The Leadership Covenant:

This covenant expresses the faith, values, spiritual practices and key behaviors that we believe are essential for leaders in MCC. It is stated in positive language that lifts up our ideals for leaders, rather than focusing on the negative. Yet, it does not avoid difficult issues, but names them.

The wording includes important faith language, but also includes insights from the social sciences and psychology.

It has been suggested we write a longer preamble, to share the history and background of the covenant, and we may go ahead and do that in time for the next Leadership Mentoring Retreat.

A Leadership Covenant for Metropolitan Community Churches

Metropolitan Community Church's global mission is to "tear down walls and build up hope!" As servant leaders in MCC, we promise to:

Reaffirm daily the primary importance of our relationship to God, as disciples of Jesus; our open-hearted relationship to God, our Divine Friend, with trust at the heart of our service.

Accept in faith the love of God as something real and redemptive, which can change lives and the world. We will challenge the untrustworthy theologies and doctrines about God that oppress and undermine the self-worth of our communities.

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[1] Marsha Stevens is the author of the famous hymn, "For Those Tears I Died," and is now a member of MCC. She is fond of saying that she takes my sermons and makes them rhyme. Marsha has written MCC General Conference theme songs for decades, and has a wonderful ministry (B.A.L.M., "Born Again Lesbian Ministry") that includes mentoring young artists.

Live in union with Jesus, and become more self-aware. We will be attentive to the dynamics of oppression in ourselves, in the church and the world.

Create lives and churches that matter!

Foster relationships and friendships based on mutuality, justice, and respect for the integrity of others and for all creation. Learn to appreciate differences rather than gloss over them.

Be willing to take risks for the sake of the gospel, for the love of God, or for the sake of another, for justice and peace.

Recognize that fear and false teaching about sexuality, healthy sexual expression and spiritual wholeness connected to sexuality causes harm. It is the foundation of abuse and cruelty to women, sexual minorities and people of variant gender identity. We will continue to embody a broader understanding of the gift of sexuality as God intended.

Be willing to question authority, and hear our own authority questioned.

Be willing to know, tell and receive truth; and to believe the best about others and their motives. Be accountable, and take responsibility for our words and choices, and corrective action when appropriate.

Avoid covering up faults and failures, or make excuses for poor behavior, rather ask for forgiveness and offer it as often as necessary; accept that people can grow and change, including us.

Become willing to participate in healing and restoring damaged relationships when possible. Commit to a process of constant reconciliation with the Body of Christ, regardless of past pain, hurt or disappointment.

Speak well of our colleagues, our co-leaders in our denomination/movement, supporting the purposes and core values of Metropolitan Community Churches as affirmed by our General Conference.

Pray for the wisdom, as leaders, to handle the authority and responsibilities we have been given with gentleness and grace, never abuse that power for our own gain.

Believe that "anything worth doing takes more than one lifetime to achieve," strengthen our movement by giving away our leadership, mentoring others, letting go when it is time.

Take the time and responsibility for living a grateful, balanced, healthy and undivided life; and to enjoy the fruit of trustworthy relationships with God, our intimate circle, the church, the wider community and all of creation.

ADDENDUM A
COMMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE 2010
LEADERSHIP MENTORING RETREAT

"I had the honor of being a part of the first annual 2010 Leadership Mentoring Retreat Program…The program was attended by a diverse group of people from around the globe. We explored models of leadership that gave us insight to our leadership style and offered us the opportunity to both affirm and shift our own models as we advance individual leadership." Rev. NGT.

"The Leadership Mentoring Retreat was an incredibly valuable experience for me. Having this focused time allowed me to reflect critically about my own leadership practices and to identify some practical areas of growth and development. And, time spent laughing, praying, and dreaming with MCC friends and colleagues is always soul-nurturing." Rev. K.A.

"The Leadership Mentoring Retreat provided me not only with the insights and tools to improve my leadership skills, but also clearly delineated the vision of UFMCC's future across the globe for the next six years. If you want to increase your own leadership abilities and nurture a strong connection to the world-wide network of leaders in UFMCC, this Retreat is for you." NGM

"It quickly became apparent that this would be some of the best, highest quality time I could spend for myself, my professional and personal development, and for my ministry. The content was excellent, with some of the best instructors I have ever experienced….I came away with renewed commitment to, my role in the worldwide ministry of MCC….There were several concrete ways I could see myself furthering the mission of MCC to reach out, to come together, to tear down walls, to build up hope."
Rev. L.H.

"The Leadership Retreat was amazing. It was the first time I was able to meet some of our leaders of MCC and experience the whole denomination of MCC. I left this retreat, knowing that God has provided me with a spiritual journey and with the help of my MCC leaders I can continue that journey. The friendships that were built with my retreat family, continue today. We are working together in Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, California, Chicago, Virginia, Florida, Washington DC and overseas to continue to TEAR DOWN WALLS AND BUILD UP HOPE. " K.M.

"I was excited to be a part of faculty for the first MCC Leadership Mentoring Retreat held in early 2010....In depth general leadership training is so important for building the future leaders of our denomination....The attendees where very engaged and serious about absorbing as much as they could to grow in their call to MCC leadership." S.C.K.

"As the one who travelled the longest way to get to the leadership mentoring retreat I want to say it was worth every single mile....We worked deeply with questions about leadership and challenges we are facing as leaders. We worked in different settings as a larger group and in small groups. It was a gift to hear the stories of others in a very open and frank atmosphere" J.G. (Germany)

"The Leadership Mentoring Retreat has provided me with a network of support and friendship that enriches me on almost a daily basis. Through the LMR I formed a bond with 21 individuals from the US, the Dominican Republic, and Europe....The LMR has given me the "wind beneath my wings" and I will be forever grateful." N.M.

"The Leadership Mentoring Retreat helped me establish a better framework for my service at the denominational level. Last year, I had a lot of concerns about putting together a volunteer program for the denomination's first General Conference in a non-English speaking country....The Retreat introduced me to organizational methods, spiritual disciplines, and friends and colleagues in ministry that allowed me to execute what I thought was a pretty good Volunteer Program...(and) helped me develop methods of linking global mission and local service, methods that I'm using as a newly elected member of the Board of my local church....I certainly I made friendships that will last a lifetime." K.M.

"The LMR was a profound and transformative experience for me. While I had begun my ordination process, I was not entirely convinced or confident that UFMCC would be the best fit for my gifts and ministry. However...I soon discovered that UFMCC was indeed for me, where I am inspired to bear witness to God's extravagant love to those at the margins. Further, I met other talented and gifted MCC'ers who invited me to imagine new possibilities for ministry when resources are limited and local circumstances are not ideal....Since the LMR, I am excited about our future and all of the good work the denomination will do. The faculty was generous and knowledgeable....They explored and reinforced with us principles such as shared ministry, servant leadership, global service, and financial and social justice stewardship, critical principles by which to build effective, disciplined local MCC churches and global partnerships that are dynamic and innovative." D.D.

"Blessings to all of you....I returned yesterday from China....I am so thankful for the blessing of attending the 2010 LMR which has inspired me to continue my journey toward ordination in MCC. I enjoyed seeing our 2010 LMR cohort again at MCC's

Conference and while there, took the training program for *Creating a Life that Matters*. I was blessed to participate in REVM this past November. God's radical love is palpable at MCC's conferences, but at LMR the stories shared, the time together and the witness of the Spirit's work in our churches, leadership and members was transformative and a blessing for me." B.J.

ADDENDUM B

LEADERSHIP MENTORING RETREAT
METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCHES
JANUARY 17-20, 2011
DAYSPRING EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE CENTER

Purpose:
To encourage, train and cultivate a new generation of trustworthy Metropolitan Community Church leaders with a bold commitment to the local and global ministry of MCC, offer an "insider view" of contemporary MCC, and a critical context for MCC ministry in the 21st century.

Goals:

1. To build an intentional, spiritual community together this week, and
2. For each person to leave with a plan to grow in spiritual leadership capacity in order to be of service to MCC globally, with a new cohort of continuous leaders.

Daily Schedule

MONDAY, JAN 17 3:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Getting to Know You and Setting the Tone	Rev. Nancy Wilson
4:00 PM – 4:30 PM	Housekeeping, Introductions and Small Group Assignments*	Rev. Robert Griffin, Retreat Chaplain
4:30 PM – 4:40 PM	Break	
4:40 PM – 6:00 PM	Module 1, Part 1 "Living an Undivided Life as a Spiritual Leader"	Rev. Mona West
6:00 PM	Dinner with your small group - introductions	
7:00 PM	Clips from **Call Me Troy** and reflections on Leadership in MCC	Rev. Don Eastman

*Individuals will remain in their group throughout the retreat, and the groups will meet together at some point during each module.

WEDNESDAY, JAN 19 7:30 AM – 8:00 AM	Devotion	Stan Kimer
8:00 AM – 9:00 AM	Breakfast	
9:00 AM – 11:00 AM	Module 4 -The Church and Technology	Rev. Tania Guzman
11:00 AM – 11:15 AM	Break	
11:15 AM – 12:00 Noon	Module 5 – Justice and Peace (Introduction)	Rev. Robert Griffin
NOON	Lunch	
1:00 PM – 2:30 PM	Module 5 - Justice and Peace (Continued)	Rev. Robert Griffin
2:30 PM – 2:45 PM	Break	
2:45 PM – 4:15 PM	Module 6, Part 1 - Becoming Trustworthy Leaders (Developing Your Leadership Style / Stewards of your Gifts and Call)	Rev. Don Eastman and Stan Kimer
4:15 PM – 4:30 PM	Break	
4:30 PM – 5:45 PM	Module 6, Part 2 – Personal and Leadership Labyrinth	Rev. Mona West
6:00 PM	Dinner with Small Group	
7:00 PM	Time with Don and Nancy – Stories! Singing and Closing Prayers	

	Work on Leadership Plan, individually	
THURSDAY, JAN 20 7:30 AM – 8:00 AM	Devotion	Rev. Robert Griffin
8:00 AM – 9:00 AM	Breakfast	
9:00 AM – 10:15 AM	Module 7 - Creating your Leadership Development Plan with your Cohort	Rev. Nancy Wilson
10:15 AM – 11:00 AM	Evaluation and Break	
11:00 AM – NOON	Covenanting Worship and Communion	

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